

**PUMLA DINEO GQOLA**

**BLACK WOMAN, YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN: IMAGES OF BLACK  
WOMEN IN *STAFFRIDER* SHORT STORIES, 1978-1982**

**THESIS RESUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

**NOVEMBER 1999**

**SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. KELWYN SOLE**

**CHANGES FOR RESUBMISSION SUPERVISED BY: ASSOC. PROF.  
LESLEY MARX, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## **Acknowledgements**

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science and Development (CSD) of the HSRC is hereby acknowledged. I am also grateful for the generous research grant awarded to me by the Mellon Foundation. My parents and siblings have provided me with unwavering support, confidence and encouragement throughout my life. I am especially thankful for their attitudes to this study. My sincere appreciation for the high level of support I received from the Darch family for the duration of my research for this dissertation. I am indebted for comments by members of the WCCR, and the UCT Race and Gender Seminar Series where parts of this dissertation were previously presented. My friends, especially Gabeba Baderoon, Angelo Fick, Kimberley A. Yates, Mncedisi Mashigoane and Tumi Kekana have provided invaluable support and wisdom. To Kelwyn Sole, I am grateful for guidance and supervision of this thesis. Lesley Marx has patiently overseen the corrections required for this re-submission and for this I am eternally grateful.

## **Acknowledgements**

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science and Development (CSD) of the HSRC is hereby acknowledged. I am also grateful for the generous research grant awarded to me by the Mellon Foundation. My parents and siblings have provided me with unwavering support, confidence and encouragement throughout my life. I am especially thankful for their attitudes to this study. My sincere appreciation for the high level of support I received from the Darch family for the duration of my research for this dissertation. I am indebted for comments by members of the WCCR, and the UCT Race and Gender Seminar Series where parts of this dissertation were previously presented. My friends, especially Gabeba Baderoon, Angelo Fick, Kimberley A. Yates, Mncedisi Mashigoane and Tumi Kekana have provided invaluable support and wisdom. To Kelwyn Sole, I am grateful for guidance and supervision of this thesis. Lesley Marx has patiently overseen the corrections required for this re-submission and for this I am eternally grateful.

## Abstract

This dissertation examines the dominant images of Black women presented in the first five years of *Staffrider* magazine. It limits itself mainly to the analysis of short stories written in the English language. Since most of the contributors were men, many of the stories analysed here are by male writers. A few poems by Black women have been analysed in addition to the short stories.

The thesis focuses on and answers the question of whether 'positive' characterisation of Black people, seen as central to Black Consciousness writing, includes women or not. The analyses take into account race, class and gender and are informed by the theories of womanism and Black feminism(s).

As much of the literature shows an overt bias in favour of the ideology of Black Consciousness, the first chapter serves an introductory function. It concentrates on an examination of the ideology of Black Consciousness and an interrogation of the literature to which it gave rise. Briefly sketching the development of BC, it examines the nature of BC literature. This entails both an study of the characteristics of the literature as well as an examination of the place of Black women in Black Consciousness discourse and literature.

While there are dynamic and stereotypical representations of Black women characters in these stories, there is a distinct preponderance of the latter. The characteristic stereotypes examined are those of the mother or spouse of a liberation fighter. She is customarily isolated and has no entry to the struggle for emancipation. Her suffering is usually equated with strength and virtue. She is trapped within the mother Africa trope. An analysis of her within this trope is the focus of Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 examines the phenomenon which sees many of the women in the early *Staffrider* classified as either moral or immoral due to the expression of their sexuality. Their value is derived exclusively from their sexual availability and behaviour. Sexuality in this chapter is used to frame

and construct an identity for the women in question. There are always clear limitations towards appropriate behaviour. The retribution for deviance is sexual violation.

The concluding chapter concentrates on the infrequent positive female characters within this body of literature. The sole commonality between these characters stems from the fullness of portrayal. Unlike the women analysed in the two earlier chapters, these women are portrayed as in control of their own destinies. As characters they are allowed by the writers the agency to act on their own behalf. Their decisions are theirs alone and this in part allows them to enter into various spheres impossible for their earlier counterparts.

The research has in so far as possible used the critical material of BC writers and/or activists; or scholars of BC and/or similar ideologies. This material has been in the form of essays and interviews. American spelling has been retained where citations from works published in the United States of America are used. The author has maintained the usage of the upper case B in Black where it denotes race except in cases where the work cited uses a lower case B.

## **Abbreviations Used**

<b>AASM</b>	<b>All Azanian Students' Movement</b>
<b>ANC</b>	<b>African National Congress</b>
<b>BC</b>	<b>Black Consciousness</b>
<b>BCM</b>	<b>Black Consciousness Movement</b>
<b>BCP</b>	<b>Black Community Programmes</b>
<b>BPC</b>	<b>Black People's Convention</b>
<b>COSAW</b>	<b>Congress of South African Writers</b>
<b>NEC</b>	<b>National Executive Council</b>
<b>NUSAS</b>	<b>National Union of South African Students</b>
<b>PAC</b>	<b>Pan Africanist Congress</b>
<b>SADF</b>	<b>South African Defence Force</b>
<b>SASO</b>	<b>South African Students Organisation</b>
<b>UCM</b>	<b>United Christian Movement</b>

# **Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abbreviations used</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>25</b>
Towards an Understanding of Black Consciousness Literature	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>67</b>
Stoic Mothers and Detached wives: The Mother Africa Trope	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>105</b>
Sexuality, Permission and the Politics of Definition	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>148</b>
Capturing the Narrative	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>202</b>



## Introduction

It seems elementary that any study which purports to examine a body of literature under one heading needs at first to explain not only the relevance of the material chosen, but also the criteria used in selecting that specific body of literature under examination.

Politics do not stand in polar opposition to our lives. Whether we desire it or not, they permeate our existence, insinuating themselves into the most private spaces of our lives<sup>1</sup>.

The views of black writers are important because as formerly colonised people, it is interesting to examine the way they internalised and interpreted the experience of colonisation as reflected by the way they form images of women<sup>2</sup>.

As this study deals exclusively with the literary material of *Staffrider*, it is important to closely interrogate the history and nature of the magazine. The link between the politics of the day and the literary production reflected in the magazine needs considerable attention. *Staffrider* magazine, established in March 1978, grew to reputable stature in the South African literary and cultural worlds. It was the brainchild of Mike Kirkwood and Mthobisi Mutloatse and published by Ravan Press. Introduced in its first issue as ‘a *skelm* of sorts’, it was named after the commuters who ride illegally (‘ride staff’) on the trains between the townships and the city of Johannesburg. It was therefore named after an aspect of Black experience.

The introductory note to the March 1978 *Staffrider* issue also proclaimed that ‘[a] whole new literature is knocking at the door, and if our society is to change without falling apart it needs all the messages it can get -- the bad as well as the good’ (1). This quotation implies that the magazine sought to achieve more than mere entertainment: it would actively participate in the dissemination of these ‘messages’. Thus *Staffrider* was introduced as a magazine which would influence social transformation largely by reflecting society to itself through the writing contained in its pages. Living up to its name, *Staffrider* entered and influenced discussions about the role and

forms which art was to take. Its populist orientation saw it publish established writers alongside of emerging artists. In this way it encouraged and provided a forum for the dissemination of new literature emerging in the country.

Because Black Consciousness (BC) was the dominant ideology at the time, many of the submissions were influenced by this doctrine. Black Consciousness aspired to liberate all Black people from the shackles of oppression. While BC's stated purpose was the complete emancipation of all Black South Africans, the only oppressive force acknowledged (in early BC) was race. Black Consciousness rested on the premise that Black people had been and would continue to be oppressed because of internalised inferiority due to institutionalised racism. BC would only be successful if this were reversed. Black Consciousness literature sought to provide positive images of Blackness, presumably both male and female. Part of this didactic function was to present 'positive images' of Black people in literature, something which was felt to be lacking in the South African literatures written prior to this. Writers who identified with Black Consciousness claimed that their literature sought to teach target Black audiences appropriate ways of behaviour. However, the ideology had clear sexist overtones. The literature it gave rise to exhibited these same nuances.

This study investigates the position of Black women within writing which exhibited traits of Black Consciousness. It does so by investigating representations of Black female characters. While there was relative consensus among activists and artists alike<sup>3</sup> on the need for 'positive' Black characters, the form these were to take was not clearly articulated. Due to the sexist overtones of the BC ideology, the position of women is a particularly fraught one. This study examines the constitution and manifestations of Black women characters in BC literature.

Because colo[u]r, gender and wealth are at the present time collective determinants of power and privilege ..., it is almost impossible to disentangle their individual

effects. Thus, those who would assert that the elimination of one type of social discrimination should have priority over all others display a naive conceptualisation of the nature of power in ... society and the multi-faceted character of social oppression<sup>4</sup>.

A movement or ideology, however vigorous and essential, which claims to hold the hope for the liberation of an entire people without fully exploring differences within the said group of people needs close analysis. For total liberation the movement or ideology needs to be fashioned so as to understand and address the dynamics which influence the lives of those very people it seeks to liberate. When this same ideology gives rise to a cultural renaissance and shapes a whole body of art, this art too needs to be closely scrutinised in these terms.

A brief examination of BC discourse betrays a gender bias towards Black men. This is indicated in Chapter 1. As Anne Phillips points out about liberation movements generally (a point which is applicable and appropriate for Black Consciousness): '[w]ith the odd exception, the entire debate on democracy has proceeded ... as if women were not there, or ... only acknowledged us to show us our place'<sup>5</sup>. Phillips continues to assert the need to invalidate male rhetoric, subvert unnecessary hierarchies and to de-centre the male. It is essential, she maintains vehemently, to break down the facade of the 'generic male'. The Black Consciousness rhetoric is characterised by sexism in both language usage and conceptualisation. This sexism which features strongly in Black Consciousness literature sustains existing inequalities while promoting new hierarchies.

The first chapter marks the beginning of an investigation from a race and gender perspective into literature that has been classified as influenced by Black Consciousness. It is imperative to define the Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa before we can arrive at a conclusion about what Black Consciousness literature is. Having completed this task, it becomes possible to justify categorising literature as BC and to locate *Staffrider* within this framework. *Staffrider* is not assumed to have carried BC literature by the mere emergence of the magazine at a

time when BC was the dominant ideology in South Africa. That many of the writers who contributed to the magazine identified themselves as proponents of BC strengthens the link between the magazine and the ideology<sup>6</sup>. The manner in which BC rhetoric acts to exclude Black women's voices and experiences forms part of the purpose of this first chapter. There are obvious links between these omissions in the rhetoric of the language and the absences of women's voices in the literature produced by Black Consciousness. This chapter does not, however, delve into any analysis of the literature at hand. It focuses rather on an introduction and explanation of what this literature entailed. Through an analysis of the language of Black Consciousness, the chapter concerns itself with an introduction of themes which are to be examined in depth in the chapters which follow. These analyses/ examinations address both literary and linguistic trends in the short stories studied.

The chapter ends with an explanation of the literary magazine *Staffrider*, in which much of BC literature was published. In an era where Black artists were suspicious of white publishers, Ravan Press had established a reputation as a progressive publishing space. Consequently, Black writers felt comfortable publishing there. It is thus not surprising that the bulk of submissions to the magazine in the period studied came from Black artists. As an aside, it is worth mentioning here that the study by no means pretends that all the writing published in *Staffrider* was Black Consciousness influenced. Some contributors to the literary magazine were white and could therefore not be proponents of BC. Works by these writers have not been examined here<sup>7</sup>. Considerable effort has been made in chapter 1 to link as many of the writers whose work is examined here to Black Consciousness. However, there were Black writers who were published in *Staffrider* who did not proceed to publish widely afterwards and who cannot be found to have explicitly linked themselves to BC ideology.

While much has been written on literary magazines in South Africa and on *Staffrider* specifically, almost none of this scholarship examines the magazine from race, gender and class perspectives simultaneously. This study will attempt to analyse the literature at hand through analyses which focus on what Rose M. Brewer (1993) identifies as 'the simultaneity of oppression' (16)<sup>8</sup>.

B.C. authors tended to privilege race in their narratives, and many critics have followed this tendency and read their texts predominantly -- and even exclusively -- in terms of race. The desire for a black unity to combat white power and prejudice led, by and large, to a romanticising of ideas of community and social harmony: downplaying class and gender tensions which might disturb this vision<sup>9</sup>.

That Boitumelo Mofokeng (1989) was pressed to take issue with the exclusion of women's writing in the anniversary publication of *Staffrider* magazine, called *Ten Years of Staffrider*, makes it evident that gender concerns in relation to Black Consciousness and the writing that it produced need exploration. Mofokeng's article 'Where are the Women?'<sup>10</sup> questions the selective celebration of the contributors to the magazine. Andries Walter Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic (1988) hail the anniversary issue as one which 'brings together some of the finest stories, poems, photographs, graphics, essays and popular history published over the last decade'<sup>11</sup>. Mofokeng questions this assertion since many of the women who contributed to the magazine are absent from the edition, presumably because they are not 'some of the finest'.

The bulk of the contributions for the first five years of *Staffrider* is from male artists. Much has been written about the paucity of Black women writers, and the lack of acknowledgement that even those who publish receive. Many Black South African women writers have themselves talked about the difficulties in writing, as have several scholars<sup>12</sup>. Due to the paucity of short story contributions to *Staffrider* by women writers in the period covered, several poems by women have been included. This is to lend greater credibility to a study of images of Black women in *Staffrider*.

The inquiry is limited to the first five years of the magazine primarily for two reasons. The first relates to limitations of space and time. Additionally, the period covered predates the establishment of an *explicit* editorial policy. Clearly there was a process of selection of materials to be published in *Staffrider* which predated the introduction of an editorial policy<sup>13</sup>. I am therefore by no means implying that *Staffrider* in the period studied represents a time where publication was a 'free for all'.

The remainder of the thesis confronts and seeks to deconstruct the ideology of the representation of Black women in the literature published in *Staffrider* in the first five years in print. When the Black female character appears in the literature to be examined, it is largely in four categories which in turn have several manifestations. There are also areas from which she is barred, sometimes in direct contradiction with the reality of South African politics (which political writing claims to reflect to a large extent).

Chapter 2 begins an examination of the manner in which Black women are framed in relation to the politics of the stories. It is worth noting here that this chapter focuses mainly on what are clearly perceived (by narrators and authors) to be positive roles assumed by these women in relation to the politics of the day. Much of the poetry published in *Staffrider* at the time focuses on the glorified image of the mother figure. The analysis in this chapter focuses, in the main, on the images of Black women characters as mothers in the short stories published in the magazine. Here the women are usually mothers and/or loyal wives to male activists. The women characters have no real place within the struggle for themselves.

[T]he images of women as presently portrayed need examination in terms of their sources, their veracity according to women's experiences, and their potential for positive transformation in the future. However, in this exercise, one cannot overlook the writer's own input in the characterisation of these women and the construction of their images<sup>14</sup>.

Rudo Gaidzanwa (1985) argues that the portrayal of women in literature may often be influenced by what the writers see in their communities. This would seem to suggest that many of the stories examined in chapter 2 in part mirror the reality of Black societies. This ‘tendency’ to mirror society onto itself is clearly in keeping with the stated purpose of the magazine *Staffrider*. If the stories accurately mirror society, they appear to point to an overall absence of Black female activists. However, there has been extensive documentation of female activism in South Africa spanning several decades at the very least. There is a substantial body of evidence to show that often women (workers, mothers, students, daughters, leaders, wives) were activists throughout the history of the liberation struggle<sup>15</sup>. The absence of women activists in the literature at hand then, is not a result of the paucity of women activists around these writers but attests to another phenomenon at work. This phenomenon points to the meaning of the undefined but lauded goal to portray ‘positive images’ espoused by the writers of BC literature.

Scholars of African and diasporic literatures have written in depth about the ‘mother Africa’ trope. This trope permeates the literature of liberation throughout the African diaspora. In it, the ideal position for a Black woman character is that which sees her as silently suffering and inevitably supportive of the male activist(s) in her life. Her body becomes linked and paralleled to the fate of the African continent. Placed on a pedestal, she is denied voice and agency. She is used to illustrate the point that somehow, her suffering in silence is meant to bear testimony to her strength. She is idolised because of her ability to remain loyal to her children and husband specifically, and her race generally, in the face of immense persecution. She often has to remain non-aggressive, loyal and nurturant to both the activists around her and to the community at large. Descriptions of this woman usually dominate the narrative. Ironically, however, this ‘domination of the narrative’ belies a real absence of her own voice and thoughts. Instead, her body, her fate and her sorrow are described in detail. Silent, she behaves appropriately and within the approved

constraints of the capitalist Black patriarchy operational within the narrative. Because there is so much expected from the mother figure, there is often no accompanying father figure. In all of the stories in Chapter 2, fathers are absent except where they act in their capacity as husbands. Feminists of all persuasions have written extensively on the tendency to present the ever-loyal mother figure in literature and media. I have drawn from this extensive body in the analysis in this chapter as well as from critics who have analysed this tendency specifically under 'the mother Africa trope'.

The image of the Black woman character as wife is similar to that of woman as mother. Both are addressed in Chapter 2. The wife is expected to behave in much the same manner as the mother figure. She too is to remain loyal, supportive and faithful to her activist husband. In this chapter the ideal wife (and mother) is one who 'is totally committed to serving the interest of her husband and her children even at the risk of martyring or sacrificing her own interest'<sup>16</sup>.

Neither the mother nor the wife is an activist herself. In chapter 2 the Black female character is important only in so far as she is ~~the~~ attached to a male activist. It is her presence which allows him to be able to fight apartheid. Florence Stratton (1994) argues that it is the colonial tendency to classify 'Africa as Female and Other' which has ironically been repeated in literatures of liberation. As a result of this, not only is Africa female and Other, but the Black female too becomes Africa and Other. As the African continent takes on the perceived characteristics of a (Black) woman, Black women characters are burdened with the traits of the continent. Although in Stratton's study the mother Africa trope permeates mainly male writing, in the *Staffrider* short stories and poetry it is a metaphor which often features prominently in Black women's writing. The trope 'operates against the interests of women, excluding them, implicitly if not explicitly, from authorship and citizenship'<sup>17</sup>. I have drawn from some of the poetry by women published in



*Staffrider* to illustrate the pervasive tendency in the magazine to often conflate the African continent with Black female characters.

Chapter 3 analyses the treatment of Black female characters who choose to transgress socially constructed boundaries of sexuality in Black patriarchy. Many of these characters are working class; and the manner in which they are explained by the narrators has explicit moralistic undertones. I tend to agree with Rudo Gaidzanwa that in such cases, '[o]bvious questions such as the writers' intentions, beliefs and values arise. There are instances where characters may be mutilated to make moral points'<sup>18</sup>.

The writers demonstrate an unease in dealing with the issue of female sexuality in the stories analysed in Chapter 3. Having established that the 'positive' and ideal place for Black women is on a pedestal, a position embodied in the mother Africa trope, it is clear that women who choose to be neither loyal mothers nor faithful wives present a problem for many of the *Staffrider* writers. These characters are condemned repeatedly because of their refusal to curb and confine their sexuality within the institution of marriage. Frequently the results which the characters are faced with as a consequence are disastrous. Repeatedly they are raped, and the narrators unequivocally blame their violation on the characters' inability/refusal to keep their sexuality in check. The raped female characters are 'mutilated' by both the male characters and the authors who repeatedly appear to be arguing that the rape is the deserved consequence of social transgression. The effect of these images is according to Gaidzanwa (1985) to 'discourage women from questioning the stereotypes and expectations placed on them. The women who step out of line suffer so much that it is not worth the trouble to rebel or question the social order'<sup>19</sup>. It is significant that these images permeate BC literature which prioritises teaching Black communities appropriate ways to behave. That transgressive women are constantly punished serves to reinforce notions of appropriate female behaviour in the target Black audiences of the stories.

These stories also serve to downplay many of the socio-economic factors which lead women to prostitution. Often other characters in the same story are explicitly critical of the desperate decision to resort to prostitution. When the reasons are not trivialised, the punishment for women who attempt to secure money through such means is severe.

Many of the sexual transgressions occur after a Black woman character has consumed alcohol. Since only one sober character is raped, the didactic thrust seems to be condemning the consumption of alcohol by these women and perhaps by the Black women in the target audience.

It is also striking that despite the high incidence of rape as punishment for social transgression, the rapist is never a Black male character. Perhaps the message is that Black men (as opposed to 'non-white' men) do not hurt Black women. It is therefore white men (characters) who are portrayed as dangerous to Black women (characters). However, Black men repeatedly hurt Black women in other significant ways in these stories. For Black women characters to engage in sexual activity with white men is portrayed as an inherently violent act. It is however (in the opinion of the narrators and, by extension, the authors) only under the influence of alcohol that Black women can, and will, have any association with white men. This is particularly striking because there are no alternatives to this kind of relationship. These stories argue against the possibility of positive and mutually beneficial relationships between Black women and white men. Ironically there are no portrayals of mutually beneficial intimate relationships between Black men and women either.

The cause-and-effect dichotomy of alcohol and rape established by these writers also serves to illustrate the only manner in which white men are perceived to oppress Black women. It is inconceivable for these *Staffrider* writers that Black women can and do experience racism from white men (and women) in ways that are of a non-sexual nature. While there are many examples of

non-sexualized racism between Black men and white men, the same option is unavailable to Black women.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to what I see as complex and sophisticated characterisation of Black female characters in the first five years of *Staffrider*. It is the shortest chapter in the dissertation and this fact attests to the paucity of Black female characters which are multi-dimensional in *Staffrider* literature for the period studied here. These characters are complex because their characterisation is captured in great detail. It is called 'Capturing the Narrative' because, unlike the women characters in the earlier chapters, these female characters are allowed to occupy positions deemed inappropriate earlier on. There are figures of activist mothers and daughters, a mother who refuses to suffer silently while her son is in detention, women who insist on making their own decisions about the manner in which their sexuality is to manifest itself, to name but a few.

These stories are by both male and female writers and as a result defy theories which declare that women writers necessarily create more sympathetic female characters. They occur sporadically throughout the first five years, and are a glimmer of hope in that they seem to increase in frequency among contributors to *Staffrider* in later years. However, this is a matter for another study.

### **Critical approaches**

'listening to their voice' should not be selective but should be inclusive as black women become engaged in the process of theorising on their own terms so that the theory is not imposed on them<sup>20</sup>.

The analysis in this study is informed in the main by the doctrines of womanism and Black feminism<sup>21</sup>. These two are especially equipped for an investigation into the portrayal of Black women in literature. This is especially so since both ideologies have emerged from the ranks of Black women who see the need to simultaneously address the various oppressions which permeate

the lives of Black women. Both have emerged because of the insufficiency of mainstream feminism(s) and nationalist struggles to adequately address the problems and oppressive factors in Black women's lives. It is the recognition that 'as Black women, our lives are in fact impacted and informed by separate discourses of gender and race, but not as separate discourses'<sup>22</sup>, which gave rise to these theories.

Various working class women's organisations of all races, and Black women of all classes, have repeatedly pointed to the shortcomings which mainstream feminism(s) pose for the lives of women who are not simultaneously white and middle class. Jeanne Wilding (1989) argues that work putting class on the feminist agenda has generally not been welcome. Routinely criticisms 'were received by many middle-class feminists with either stony silence, a yawn, irritation, a dismissal or annoyance and defensiveness'<sup>23</sup>. Further, as Gill Newham (1989) asserts, 'Woman-Power may not mean power for all women'<sup>24</sup>. Recently many white middle class feminists have claimed that mainstream feminism has recently heeded these criticism from women who feel alienated by its discourse<sup>25</sup>. But, as Desiree Lewis argues '[g]enerally, when white middle-class feminists talk about "women", they mean white women, in the same way that discussion of racism is usually predicated on the experiences of black men'<sup>26</sup>.

There are several ways in which issues of race and class can be addressed when analysing Black women's texts. A popular but inadequate approach is the additive approach where disjointed analyses are applied as if the subject under discussion were able to be divided into separate components independently impacted upon by race, class and gender. This approach has received increasing attention from women marginalised by mainstream feminism(s) internationally. Angela Y. Davis (1990) comments succinctly on this tendency to examine the perceived separate effects of race, class and gender by mainstream feminists<sup>27</sup> when studying the work and lives of women of colour. Davis argues that mainstream white feminists continue to act 'as if there were such a

phenomenon as abstract womanhood suffering abstract sexism and fighting back in an abstract historical context<sup>28</sup>.

Womanist scholarship pays serious attention to the manner in which the various oppressions *work together*<sup>29</sup>. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985)<sup>30</sup> maintains that,

[T]he womanist vision is racially conscious in its underscoring of the positive aspects of black life. The politics of the womanist is unique in its racial-sexual ramifications; it is more complex than white sexual politics, for it addresses more directly the ultimate question relating to power: how do we share equitably the world's wealth and concomitant power and between the sexes<sup>31</sup>?

In defence of womanism, Kimberley A. Yates further asserts

that,

[W]omanism does not privilege race over gender; instead it centres on Black women, or women of colour, women who are always simultaneously both. Indeed I do not know how many different ways one can say *at the same time*: simultaneously, concurrently, concomitantly, together, all together, synchronous, in unison, in concert, in chorus, in conjunction, inseparable, inseverable, indivisible, undividable, indissoluble, constant<sup>32</sup>.

Fawzia Afzal-Khan maintains that literary critics need to engage in what she terms 'resistance criticism'. She defines this as a criticism informed by the connection between 'theoretical praxis, literary form and political struggle' (1996:35). For Afzal-Khan this type of criticism is possible only if critics are to 'recognise the necessity for a multipronged approach to resistance struggle (personal, political and cultural) which, in fact, can work only if one acknowledges the multiplicity of "black" experience' (1996:40). She identifies this as a necessary part of Black feminist/womanist criticism.

Cheryl Rodriguez (1996) echoes Afzal-Khan arguing that womanist scholarship is informed by 'the interaction of Afrocentric, multicultural, and feminist theoretical interpretations of political, economic, historical, social, and cultural' events (4).

Womanism was named and structured by women of colour to more realistically interrogate the interrelatedness of the oppressive forces<sup>33</sup>. It is fitting that BC, an ideology which aimed to liberate all Black people, should be analysed through the use of theories with a similar intention. The difference is that womanism and Black feminism recognise that for all Black people to be liberated, all oppressions need to be dismantled. Black feminist thought and womanist theory acknowledge and seek to address the interconnected nature of the forces of oppression as they are played out in the lives of women (and communities) of colour everywhere. It is equally fitting that ideologies which place the lives and experiences of women of colour at the centre should be used here to interrogate images of Black women in the literature at hand.

It is worth noting here, however, that there is much discussion in Black feminist and womanist circles around how the two ideologies are defined. Barbara Christian (1995) addresses this call for definitions of Black feminist literary theory thus,

I, for one, am tired of being asked to produce a black feminist literary theory as if I were a mechanical man. For I believe that such a theory is prescriptive -- it ought to have some relationship to practice. Since I can count on one hand [sic] the number of people attempting to be black feminist literary critics in the world today, I consider it presumptuous for me to invent a theory we ought to read. Instead, I think we need to read the works of our writers in our ways and remain open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race and gender in the literature. And it would help if we share our process, that is, our practice as much as possible since, finally our work is a collective endeavour (459).

Not all Black feminists and womanists are as resistant to defining the composition of these tenets however. Indeed there appears to be relative consensus around the composition of Black feminist/womanist thought. Black feminists and womanists stress the need for the acknowledgement and dismantling of the nexus of oppressions which operate to discriminate against Black women globally. These systems of oppression are defined as those including (but not confined to) racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism/homophobia (Afzal-Khan, 1996; Rodriguez, 1996; Christian, 1995; Yates, 1996; James & Busia, 1993; Lewis, 1993; Maqagi,

1989). Black feminist and womanist theorists also stress the importance of self-definition and agency disavowing the victim label often attached to Black women (Collins, 1990; Lewis, 1993; James, 1993; Mirza, 1997). Central to both Black feminism and womanism is the valuing of the everyday experiences of Black women. Indeed many theorists have identified this as central to the formation and sustenance of ideologies/critiques which place Black women's experiences at the centre (Collins, 1990; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983; Phillips & MacCaskill, 1995; Stone, 1989; James, 1993). In the main self-identified Black feminists and womanists are in agreement over the nature of what constitutes Black feminist and womanist thought.

The contentious issue centres around who can be defined as a Black feminist or a womanist. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) insists that only Black women can become Black feminists or womanists because of the importance of self-definition in both. Collins maintains that being a Black woman provides the base knowledge necessary to become a Black feminist/womanist<sup>34</sup>. She, nonetheless, acknowledges that not all Black women become Black feminist due in large part to several factors in society which work to suppress its articulation. Cheryl Rodriguez (1996) in part echoes this and proceeds to articulate a specific commitment to unmasking and dismantling the nexus of oppression in the lives of Black women. She argues that women of colour have adopted, among others, the labels 'womanist', 'Black feminist', 'African feminist', and 'Third World feminist' to 'denote the liberatory theories, historical, cultural, social, economic, and political realities globally' (1996: 6). Bonnie Johnson<sup>35</sup> highlights the importance of self-definition when distinguishing between women of colour with a stated feminist awareness and Black feminists/womanists. Speaking on behalf of the Black women published in her volume *Black British Feminism*, Mirza (1997) rejects Collins' definition of a Black feminist. She argues instead that a Black feminist/womanist is one whose perspective is informed by Black feminist thought regardless of biological makeup.

The rallying cry of BC was 'Black man, you are on your own'. This study is called 'Black woman, you are on your own' because Black women's lives are not in all aspects like Black men's, nor are they exactly like white women's. The title is also in keeping with womanist and Black feminist emphasis to locate Black female experience at the centre of analysis. In view of current discussions regarding South African gender theories, it is of paramount importance to give adequate attention to an understanding of the nexus of oppressions. The emergence of various forms of 'feminisms' by women of colour, of which womanism and Black feminism are two, internationally equips critics now more than ever to deal with issues of gender, race and class. It is the impression of this writer that womanism and Black feminism are ideal as tools to interrogate BC literature, and especially the position of Black women characters therein.

To reiterate here what I have argued elsewhere<sup>36</sup>.

It would appear ... that -- regardless of the political situation we find ourselves in as South Africans -- there is a considerable need to move beyond a mere 'acknowledgement' of difference. Black women should take the lead in formulating the ways in which our lives and work are to be analysed. As gender theorists, analysts and scholars (both Black and white) we need to realistically assess the tools we use to analyse women's lives in our everyday circumstances.

Womanism and Black feminism(s) make no claims for universal applicability to women of all races. Both centre on the need to theorise specific interactions of race, class and gender<sup>37</sup>. Arguably (some of)<sup>38</sup> the two most effective tools to analyse the status of Black women, these theories will inform the analysis through which the literature is interpreted.

While I have drawn extensively from critics and writers who are non-Black feminist/womanist<sup>39</sup> in my analysis of the literature at hand, my approach is explicitly informed by Black feminist and womanist thinking. This means, in part, that as a womanist critic, I have sought to place an analysis of Black female characters at the centre of my analysis. Additionally my analysis has rejected reducing the Black female characters to simplistic descriptions of their victim status.



The rallying cry of BC was 'Black man, you are on your own'. This study is called 'Black woman, you are on your own' because Black women's lives are not in all aspects like Black men's, nor are they exactly like white women's. The title is also in keeping with womanist and Black feminist emphasis to locate Black female experience at the centre of analysis. In view of current discussions regarding South African gender theories, it is of paramount importance to give adequate attention to an understanding of the nexus of oppressions. The emergence of various forms of 'feminisms' by women of colour, of which womanism and Black feminism are two, internationally equips critics now more than ever to deal with issues of gender, race and class. It is the impression of this writer that womanism and Black feminism are ideal as tools to interrogate BC literature, and especially the position of Black women characters therein.

To reiterate here what I have argued elsewhere<sup>36</sup>.

It would appear ... that -- regardless of the political situation we find ourselves in as South Africans -- there is a considerable need to move beyond a mere 'acknowledgement' of difference. Black women should take the lead in formulating the ways in which our lives and work are to be analysed. As gender theorists, analysts and scholars (both Black and white) we need to realistically assess the tools we use to analyse women's lives in our everyday circumstances.

Womanism and Black feminism(s) make no claims for universal applicability to women of all races. Both centre on the need to theorise specific interactions of race, class and gender<sup>37</sup>. Arguably (some of)<sup>38</sup> the two most effective tools to analyse the status of Black women, these theories will inform the analysis through which the literature is interpreted.

While I have drawn extensively from critics and writers who are non-Black feminist/womanist<sup>39</sup> in my analysis of the literature at hand, my approach is explicitly informed by Black feminist and womanist thinking. This means, in part, that as a womanist critic, I have sought to place an analysis of Black female characters at the centre of my analysis. Additionally my analysis has rejected reducing the Black female characters to simplistic descriptions of their victim status.

This is not to say that the characters <sup>are</sup> ~~have~~ out of the control of their creators. Instead I have engaged in what Brewer calls multiplicative analysis of the nexus of oppressions, by treating the characters not as if they are subjects upon which the influences of race, class, gender and sexuality impact separately but have paid attention to the manner in which all these factors (and others) impact jointly on their characterisations.

The stated goal of positive characterisation by BC writers, and my investigation of the manifestation and understanding of what this positivity entails takes heed of the criticisms levelled by Toril Moi (1985) and Judith Butler (1990) against what Moi labels 'images of women criticism'. As a precursor to a discussions of the warnings contained in the work of these two theorists, it is important to stress that Moi's chapter is a response to the deficiencies of 'images of women' as exhibited in one particular collection of essays<sup>40</sup>. Although they can be seen to be critiquing similar tendencies in feminist criticism, Moi and Butler do not make the same argument. Moi takes issue with this 'fertile body of criticism' because of what she sees as its position *vis a vis* extra-textual, especially that of the critic. This body of criticism is limited because it is sociological rather than literary, because it attempts to measure images of female characters according to their proximity to real life women, undermined the creative function of the writers and concerned with the development of the reader rather than as an artistic venture<sup>41</sup>. Black feminist/womanist theory emerged primarily as a literary theory, influenced by life experience, but not sociological in its theorisation. My reading where it is critical of the characterisation of Black female characters faults the latter not because it does not mirror reality adequately, but because of the stereotypes presented and perpetuated in the literature at hand. The connection~~y~~ made between the literary material published in *Staffrider* and the lives of the intended Black audiences is not made by me, but by the writers. Furthermore it is not central to my analysis in this project. What is central is the examination of the meaning of what was meant by 'positive images of Black people' by the writers

here examined. I investigate this through an analysis of the manifestations/representations of Black women within a literature informed by an ideology which is masculinist. I am in agreement with Moi when she concludes, '[l]iterary works can and should be of course criticised for having selected and shaped their fictional universe according to oppressive and objectionable ideological assumptions' (1985: 46).

Judith Butler (1990) suggests that,

It is not enough to enquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'women', the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought<sup>42</sup>.

For Butler then it is important that the tools through which constructions are analysed and the lenses through which it is viewed are themselves subjected to scrutiny. She invites a complex analysis of feminist analyses which do not seek to essentialise their subjects but charges that critics should be wary because 'it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained' (3).

Neither Butler nor Moi then appear to be at odds with Black feminist/womanist literary criticism. In fact Butler at times echoes precisely the concerns with feminist literary criticism first raised by socialist feminist and Black feminist literary critics.

### **Techniques Explained**

For the purposes of this thesis, there are several pointers or approaches which I have adopted which may need explanation due to academic expectation and presentation. This is because the said approaches may be construed as inapplicable and/or obscure to an academic study.

In South African society the racial marker 'black' is used in several ways to denote a range of meanings. 'Black' is used here in accordance with its definition and usage in Black

Consciousness. Throughout the dissertation 'Black' is capitalised when it refers to race and the lower case is maintained in cases where colour is referred to. The lower case is unchanged in quotations even when it refers to race.

Where I have deemed it essential for the meaning and action of the story, I have provided the translated meanings of characters' names. It should be noted that in these cases it is the closest English translation possible which is provided. There are incidences where writers allude to occurrences which are generally taken to be recognisable by South African Black communities. Often these facts are general Black knowledge and may not have been documented and remain therefore unfamiliar to many white academic audiences. Where this is the case, I have provided background to what appear to be the assumptions behind the narrative technique. An obvious example appears in the final chapter, where Thandeka's father partly explains his disapproval of his daughter's choice of partner through the fact of his being Shangaan. That this is more than a mere case of self-hate would be obvious to Black South African audiences urban and rural, then and now<sup>43</sup>.

Several Black scholars have questioned the manner in which knowledge is produced. It becomes even clearer that there is an obvious need for epistemologies which 'recognise the experiences of Black people can be "scientifically" validated, whatever that means'<sup>44</sup>. Layli Phillips and Barbara MacCaskill (1995) draw attention to the same phenomenon when they argue for the need to challenge the knowledge that conceptualises 'education as [something] emanating from the academy [and transmitted] to "the community"'<sup>45</sup>. This complicates the manner in which 'evidence' is to be provided for an academic work or argument. [B]ell hooks expresses it thus, '[w]ithout [Black women's] voices in written work and written presentation there will be no articulation of our concerns'<sup>46</sup>. In academia one need not explain what is perceived as general knowledge. However, it is worth noting here that general knowledge is culture specific. For instance, it is generally accepted

that in Western(ised) societies eye contact implies a level of honesty and willingness to engage with person being addressed. It would thus be unnecessary for a writer to explain why a shifty person who would not establish eye contact during a business meeting is difficult to trust. This would be seen as general knowledge even within academic circles. However, it is also general knowledge in many South African Black societies that to look a person in the eye implies intimacy and familiarity which makes it a rude act when the person addressed is not a close associate. The differences between the two types of 'general knowledge' is that one is recognised and easily accessible to academic study, while the other is less understood or acknowledged. How then does one document or refer to common knowledge when it is not common knowledge in academia? In this study I have, in as far as has been possible, tried to give background knowledge to Black general knowledge which may be unfamiliar to white academic researchers.

These are problems which I have been aware of and which have influenced and moulded part of this study. I have not resolved them here. Instead, I continue to grapple with the problematics (as do many other Black scholars). Where possible this knowledge has been contextualized as far as possible within the parameters of academic practice and dictates. This has repeatedly posed problems since one tends to under-explain what one sees as obvious. In so far as possible, I have tried to take that into account which then paradoxically introduces the possibility of over-explanation.

I have occasionally allowed my own voice to come through forcefully in this thesis. This is largely due to my rejection of the contradiction which would result in my denouncing the silencing of Black women whilst silencing my own voice, and allowing my thoughts to be explained to me by the voice of the white male canon. This would be an insult to BC writers who made such a successful attempt to 'pee, spit and shit on literary convention' and specifically to the women who wrote under its auspices. While I realise that 'disrespect' (or 'insult') is as unrecognised a

motivation for academic practice as is Black 'knowledge', these are issues that remain as important for Black scholars today as literary standards were for the writers whose work is studied here. I am aware also of the irony of needing to 'explain myself' even as I study work by Black South Africans who by and large refused to explain themselves.

Ketu H. Katrak (1989) has alluded to the dilemma of what I have termed 'disrespect' above as an issue of 'social responsibility' for critics. It is useful at this stage to quote Katrak in detail here:

The concept of social responsibility, not only for postcolonial writers but also for critics/theorists, is central to my concern. Social responsibility must be the basis of any theorizing on postcolonial literature as well the root of the creative work on the writers themselves. Whereas writers commonly respond to the many urgent issues of their societies, critics/theorists of this literature often do not (255).

The writers studied here clearly 'respond[ed] to the many urgent issues of their society'. Womanist scholarship and Black feminist theory respond to similar invitations. Afzal-Khan asserts that Black feminism and womanism when they find expression in academia is an invitation to be able to say, 'we all must do what we can wherever we are located' (1996: 44). Black feminism and womanism draw attention to and reject the 'clear' distinction between academic theorising and 'urgent issues of [our] societies'. Both are seen to be an integral part of what womanists term 'the everyday'.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In Davis (1990): 53. This is how she begins her essay titled, 'Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: The Politics of Black Women's Health'.

<sup>2</sup> In Gaidzanwa (1985): 8.

<sup>3</sup> I do not here attempt to create an artificial distinction between artists and activists. Indeed, as will be shown later, many artists who were published in *Staffrider* identified themselves as both. Their art was often identified (by the artists themselves) as a type of activism.

<sup>4</sup> In Stone (1989): 586.

<sup>5</sup> In Phillips (1991): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Artists who contributed to *Staffrider* explicitly claimed allegiance to the ideology of Black Consciousness both individually (in interviews and writings) and well as through statements published in *Staffrider* by/on behalf of the art groups they belonged to. Some of these writers are

referred to/quoted in chapter 1 as making the links between their writing, *Staffrider* and the ideology of BC explicit.

<sup>7</sup> Since white writers cannot be said to have been BC activists/proponents, their works are not examined here.

<sup>8</sup> Brewer identifies the 'major propositions of such a stance' as those which include:

- 1 critiquing dichotomous oppositional thinking by employing both/and rather than either/or categorizations
- 2 allowing for the simultaneity of oppression and struggle, thus
- 3 eschewing additive analyses: race + class + gender
- 4 which leads to an understanding of the embeddedness and relationality of race, class and gender and the multiplicative nature of these relationships: race X class X gender
- 5 reconstructing the lived experiences, historical positioning, cultural perceptions and social construction of Black women who are enmeshed in and whose ideas merge out of that experience.

<sup>9</sup> In Sole (1993): 10.

<sup>10</sup> Published in *Current Writing* 1: 41-42.

<sup>11</sup> In Oliphant & Vladislavic (1988): viii.

<sup>12</sup> Miriam Tlali addresses this issue in several of her interviews. See her comments in her interview with Jaki Seroke (along with Mothobi Mutloatse and Siphos Sepamla) in *Staffrider* Vol 4.3 (November 1981). See also Lenta, Margaret and Margaret Daymond. 1990. 'Workshop on Black Women's Writing and Reading', *Current Writing* 2. See also James, Adeola. 1990. 'Introduction', *In Their Own Voices: Women Writers Speak*. London: Heinemann.

<sup>13</sup> An unsigned note advertising under the heading 'Critics Wanted' (*Staffrider* 2.4) announces:

The phenomenon of art groups linked to particular township communities in present-day South Africa [allows for] the art group [to] put forward the work it wants to be published, and then assists in the distribution of the magazine to the community. *In this way editorial control is vested in the writers as participants in a community based group.*

Those who suggest that *Staffrider* should appoint an editor whose task is to impose 'standards' on the magazine are expressing -- consciously or unconsciously -- an elitist view of art which cannot comprehend the new artistic energies released in the tumult of 1976 and after. *Standards are not golden or quintessential: they are made according to the demands different societies make on writers, and according to the responses writers make to those demands.* (Emphasis added)

<sup>14</sup> In Gaidzanwa (1985): 10.

<sup>15</sup> Many women have documented in volumes and anthologies their participation in politics. There have also been numerous political autobiographies by women activists who talk of their work in political structures. There were prominent women who enjoyed countrywide prominence because of active resistance to apartheid: Winnie Mandela, Lilian Ngoyi, Ellen Kuzwayo, Mamphela Ramphele, Theljiwe Mtintso, Cheryl Carolus, Victoria Mxenge, to name a few. It would appear therefore that there has always been evidence of women in positions other than those of support.

<sup>16</sup> In Gaidzanwa (1985): 29.

<sup>17</sup> In Stratton (1994): 40.

<sup>18</sup> In Gaidzanwa (1985): 10.

<sup>19</sup> In Gaidzanwa (1985): 12.

<sup>20</sup> In Maqagi (1990): 23.

<sup>21</sup> I use Black feminism here and not Black feminism(s). None of the critics and writers used speak of Black feminisms. By way of explanation, Heidi Safia Mirza (1997) offers,

[W]e speak of black feminism, not black feminism(s). This is because the political project has a single purpose: to excavate the silences and pathological appearances of a collectivity of women assigned as the 'other' and produced in gendered, sexualized, wholly racialized discourse. Black feminism has many ways of doing this. ... If anything, what our struggles demonstrate is that you can have difference (polyvocality) within a conscious construction of sameness (i.e. black feminism) (21).

<sup>22</sup> In Yates (1996): 21.

<sup>23</sup> In Wilding (1989): 311.

<sup>24</sup> In Newham (1989): 262.

<sup>25</sup> For some of the South African debates on the topic, see *Current Writing* 1 (1989) and 2 (1990). See also A. Moodley. 1993. 'Black woman: you are on your own', *Agenda* 16; Desiree Lewis. 1994. 'Women and Gender in South Africa' in Vincent Maphai (ed) *South Africa: The Challenge of Change*, Harare: SAPES Books; Desiree Lewis. 1993. 'Feminisms in South Africa', *Women's Studies Forum* 16.5; Miriam Tlali. 1994. 'Women's Liberation in South Africa' Paper delivered at the Southern Africa Research Conference, etc.

<sup>26</sup> In Lewis (1993): 540.

<sup>27</sup> I am aware of the defensive insistence by many feminist theorists of the need to speak of feminisms and the need to acknowledge diversity within feminist discourses. I use the term 'mainstream feminism' here in accordance with its widespread use by many who embrace a qualified feminism (Marxist feminist, Black feminist/womanist, Black lesbian feminist/Zami, lesbian feminist, etc.) use it. It is my opinion that there are common characteristics attributed by those with qualified feminisms to 'mainstream feminism'.

<sup>28</sup> In Davis (1990): 18.

<sup>29</sup> I argue in an earlier article that feminist scholarship tends to pay lip-service to the co-existence of oppressions. See my 'Reconsidering Motherhood in the Autobiographies of Emma Mashinini and Ellen Kuzwayo', *Inter Action* 4: 47-52.

<sup>30</sup> As indeed do many womanist scholars. For a sample see Alice Walker. 1984. 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' and her definition of womanism, both in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, London: Women's Press. See also Layli Phillips and Barbara MacCaskill. 1995. 'Who's Schooling Who?: Black Women and The Bringing Of The Everyday into Academe, or Why We Started *The Womanist*', *Signs* Summer. See also Kimberley Yates' essay 'To Be Feminist Or Not To Be, That Is Not The Question: A Womanist Critique', Paper presented at Inter Action Conference, Bains Kloof, September 1996.

<sup>31</sup> In Ogunyemi (1985): 68.

<sup>32</sup> In Yates (1996): 18.

<sup>33</sup> Both Alice Walker (1984) and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985) stress this in their definitions of womanism. Walker and Ogunyemi stress the importance of interrogating race and gender as points of analysis. Most subsequent writings by Black feminists and womanists echo this.

<sup>34</sup> Patricia Hill Collins argues that the differences between Black feminism and womanism lie in the name more than in what each propagates. This is a view shared by some womanists and Black feminists. It is not, however, an area where consensus has been reached. Cheryl Rodriguez and



Fawzia Afzal-Khan agree with Collins' evaluation as do clearly the founding editors of the journal *Womanist Theory and Research: A Journal of Womanist and Feminist-of-Color Scholarship and Art*. Desiree Lewis and Zoë Wicomb do not espouse this view as has been demonstrated in various articles penned by them on the topic of Black women and feminist awareness.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Collins (1990).

<sup>36</sup> In Gqola (1997): 2.

<sup>37</sup> There is little consensus on the difference between womanism and Black feminism in South African academic writing. Desiree Lewis's essays 'Women and Gender in South Africa' *op cit.* and 'Feminisms in South Africa' *op cit.* explore the need for Black feminism and suggest problems with womanism. Kimberley A. Yates' essay 'To Be Feminist or Not To Be: That Is Not The Question: A Womanist Critique' *op cit.* and my 'Black Women's Spaces and the Production of Knowledge: Setting the Record Straight on Womanist Issues' *op cit.* discuss the manner in which theories by Black women need to take precedence over others when studying Black women's lives. Yates' article is in part a response to the two Lewis articles. Both Yates' and my article deal in part with the differences between Black feminism and womanism. See also Sisi Maqagi's 'WhoTheorises?' *op cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Various 'feminisms' originated by women of colour have similar aims and possibilities. These include African feminism, some strands of Third World feminism, Zami (Black lesbian feminism), etc.

<sup>39</sup> I have used the work of among others Marxists, socialist feminists, unqualified feminists, lesbian feminists, self-identified post-colonial critics and Black lesbian feminists/Zamis.

<sup>40</sup> The text is the 1973 edition of Susan Koppelman Cornillon. (ed). *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press.

<sup>41</sup> Moi argues variously that this body of criticism is in Cornillon's volume particularly, 'presented as one essentially concerned with nurturing personal growth and raising the individual consciousness by linking literature to life, particularly to the lived experiences of the reader'(43); '[is] equivalent to studying *false* images of women in fiction written by both sexes. The 'image' of women in literature is invariably defined in opposition to the 'real person' whom literature never quite manages to convey to the reader.'(44-5); and '[it is premised upon the belief that] art should reflect life accurately and inclusively in every detail'(45).

<sup>42</sup> Butler (1990): 2.

<sup>43</sup> I am grateful to Kelwyn Sole for pointing my attention to the fact that self-hate is not a phenomenon which is part of a global general knowledge and therefore needed unpacking.

<sup>44</sup> In Kwadi (1996): 1.

<sup>45</sup> From their essay 'Who's Schooling Who?' *op cit.*

<sup>46</sup> In hooks (1994): 105.

## Chapter 1:

### **Towards An Understanding of Black Consciousness Literature**

The Black response to racism is a complex one. Acceptance of the oppressor's viewpoint is but one aspect. Every Black from cradle to grave, is faced with evidence of his or her secondary status in society. This perception of one's worth is deeply painful to one's ego. A common response is the defence mechanism of denial, not of one's alleged inferiority, but of one's very blackness. Since all the symbols of success -- material comforts, and scientific and literary achievements -- are presented from a Eurocentric perspective, they are associated with whiteness. The superficial symbols of the denial of Blackness are evident in the (formerly) widespread use of skin-lightening and hair-straightening agents by Black women<sup>1</sup>.

The above is an extract from a compilation of essays which seeks to explain and celebrate the Black Consciousness era in South Africa. It is from an article by C.D.T. Sibisi, 'The Psychology of Liberation', and I begin the section with it because it illuminates not only the nature of BC thought, but something of its ambiguities and subtleties regarding perceptions about Black women. The main aim of this dissertation is to explore and investigate the nature of these ambiguities in the ideology of Black Consciousness as well as in the literature it gave rise to.

Black Consciousness emerged in the 1960s as a response largely to the political vacuum created by the relentless State repression and bannings that characterised the post Sharpeville era (Buthelezi, 1991: 111, Rive, 1982: 13, Wilkinson, 1992: 150 and 178). After the massacre at Sharpeville, the National Party government proceeded to ban the two largest political parties in the country at the time, the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), along with all the other formations and organisations that it saw as a threat to the policy of apartheid (Buthelezi, 1991: 111-2; Mzamane, 1991: 179 and Biko, 1987: 34). This included individuals who had in various ways been actively opposed to apartheid; be it in or through politics, social activity, writing, or other means. Consequently the need in South African society to voice

collective opposition to apartheid was suppressed<sup>2</sup>, necessitating that new ways of dealing with apartheid reality be explored. Since the banned organisations, exiled and jailed activists had articulated some of the experiences of the people, a new form of opposition to the government policies had to emerge.

Black Consciousness is an ideology that found eloquence in the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and as a consequence only became fully formulated within and by this student body. Sipho Buthelezi (1991) argues that SASO itself came into being in the late 1960's when Black students at universities in South Africa felt that there was a need to represent their opinions and to generate solidarity among the country's Black student population. The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), which had until then been the only organisation for university students in South Africa and had placed itself in opposition to the apartheid establishment, was felt to be too liberal and generally not catering for the political needs of Black students. As Millard Arnold (1979) writes,

[u]ntil 1968, black students saw NUSAS as their one and only meaningful vehicle for change. Disillusionment began to grow, however, as NUSAS seemed to confine itself to symbolic multiracial activities and protests after-the-fact against government infringements on academic freedom<sup>3</sup>.

At the NUSAS congress held at Rhodes University in 1967,

[Steve] Biko challenged NUSAS to take an active stance against the segregated residential facilities which Rhodes University had imposed on the congress. The university discriminated against black delegates: 'Indians' and 'Coloureds' had to stay in town while Africans were required to stay some distance away in a church location; whites, on the other hand, could stay in the university residences<sup>4</sup>.

It appears that there were profound incongruities in the prioritization process and *modus operandi* of existent non-racial organisations such as NUSAS. Black students experienced a sense of alienation and domination by white students even in those organisations that were supposed to fight racism<sup>5</sup>. Budlender attributes this to a combination of two factors: the questioning of the manner in

which NUSAS operated as well as its structure of as an organisation (Budlender, 1991: 229). Many Black students recognised that NUSAS had structurally replicated the South African racial political system with the leadership and decision making bodies being largely white, and Black students having to take a backseat in the active propelling of an organisation that sought to bring about their liberation. The position of Black students within NUSAS mirrored the relationship between South African Blacks and liberal whites in South African politics. This recognition added urgency to the need for Black students to break away from NUSAS. It was thus understood by Black students that the way forward was to create an atmosphere where, in order to escape such frustration, Black solidarity was the only option. SASO was founded when Black students realised the need for an organisation in which they had a say, one that would be representative of their opinions, aspirations and would take cognisance of how they wanted to operate whilst simultaneously generating solidarity between the various Black campuses (Buthelezi, 1991: 112). As Biko wrote in the editorial to *Black Viewpoint* 1972, what needed to change was that, '[s]o many things are said so often to us, about us and for us, but very seldom by us' (1).

What is now commonly recognised as BC ideology only crystallised out of 'the perception of the role of black students in their liberation' (Buthelezi, 1991: 118). Black Consciousness, as it emerged through SASO and as chronicled in both the *SASO Newsletter* and *SASO Bulletin*, has a strong emphasis on Black self-reliance. For a long time, BC neither pretended to be a substitute/alternative nor an extension of the exiled liberation movements.

In an article titled 'the black thing... is honest...is human', Mafika Pascal Gwala (1972) writes:

The Black who becomes aware of his Blackness and its implications in a racist society will often strive, to a large measure of success or failure, for self-definition. This self-definition will take the form of a negation. That is neglecting all that has been imposed on him, superimposed by white cultural values, white economic domination and white stratification of society. And when a man begins to negate he is refusing to see himself as a commodity.

This is when the consciousness of contestation emerges. This contestation will bear an essentially black character. Black in its doubts about white superiority, its criticism of white values and its challenge of White right. This is when Black Consciousness takes form. Black Consciousness calls for a redefinition of concepts. Cultural, economic, social and theological concepts as seen by the Black and seeing them through his own Black self (13).

The power and success of apartheid can be attributed to firstly, its emphasis on division and differences; and secondly, on its ability to constantly reinforce a negative self image in those it sought to subjugate. Those oppressed on the basis of their race were divided into what the South African system labelled, 'Coloured', 'Indian', and 'African'. (The latter previously Native, Bantu, etc.) Further 'Africans' were separated into what was felt to be their respective 'ethnic' or 'tribal' groupings.

If apartheid worked well because it divided Black people, Black Consciousness realised that the most effective tool against racism as a force was Black solidarity. It was also important that Black people decide *for themselves* how and when this struggle was going to take place. BC was therefore a doctrine that preached Black affirmation and Black self-definition along with Black solidarity. Black people (seen by the government as separate 'races') were all part of one oppressed mass according to BC. Black solidarity (solidarity of the oppressed masses) was critical if the apartheid government was to be successfully toppled<sup>6</sup>.

The definition of Blackness received great emphasis in Black Consciousness ideology. This seemed appropriate in a movement which sought to rectify the false and negative imaging of Black people by white power. Black self-redefinition was identified as crucial to toppling the power structure which, under apartheid, was identified as primarily based on race (Gwala, 1972). A crucial step in this direction was seen to be mental emancipation, or as labelled by BC, psychological liberation. This liberation entailed a rejection of the values that sustained white society to the

detriment of Black society. Where white society labelled everything black (and by extension Black) as degenerate and base, Black consciousness emphasised positive images of Blackness (and blackness). In the English language particularly 'black' is used almost exclusively to refer to the sinister and undesirable. Black Consciousness recognised that there was a connection between this colour bias in language and the race prejudice in South African society. It was therefore essential for Black people to redefine and take charge of the meaning of Blackness themselves for BC to be a success.

The BC stance on white people was that there were essentially three groups of whites in South Africa. There were proudly racist whites, who were to be fought. Then there were liberals, who although apparently opposed to apartheid, neither protested too loudly nor were willing to give up the life of comfort that only white South Africans could indulge in. Then there were a few 'good whites' who made an active commitment to fighting apartheid, but these were too few to demand much attention from the BCM<sup>7</sup>. There was little concern with the sentiment and sanction of white South Africa, as Black people from all walks of life dedicated their lives to the benefit of Black communities and Black interest, making a commitment to BC and therefore to Black liberation. BC organisations such as the Black Community Programmes (BCP) developed and ran projects in Black communities. These began because, according to Mamphela Ramphele (1991a),

[Y]oung activists recognised that their status as students accorded them privileges not available to the 'toiling black masses'. Students were thus urged to plough back their acquired skills into the community for the development of the poor<sup>8</sup>.

These community programmes ranged from assisting informal settlement communities to build more durable housing, health work carried out at several hospitals (and later BCP established clinics) to rural development projects<sup>9</sup>.

BC rejected all definitions of Black as profane and/or deviant and white as inherently good.

The move was towards a self-formulated way of life which necessitated, it was held in BC, an organisational and conceptual separation from white society. For Black people to be able to know that Black is not deviant, they would have to embark on a movement that prioritised self-definition; where Black people could think and do things for themselves without having to rely on white patronage. Black people needed to be able to feel validated and affirmed by a positive Black environment, in the absence of white people to be able to really realise their full potential. In a racially mixed organisational environment, because of racism the white people would always be at an advantage over their Black counterparts. It was therefore identified as essential that Black people form racially exclusive organisations to foster Black self-reliance. It would be possible at a later undeclared stage to embrace non-racism. Since Black people were not in a position to physically exclude themselves from white South Africa entirely due to economic reasons, racially exclusive organisations were the only avenue to effectively empower Black people. Mixed race organisations tended, it was felt in BC circles, to foster dependency in Black people and this pattern needed to be broken in favour of self-reliance. Multiracial situations largely reinforced those values and situations in South African life that mirrored the apartheid reality, what was then referred to as 'second class apartheid' (Buthelezi, 1991: 118). There was therefore a rejection of non-racism as an appropriate means of achieving liberation. Black people needed to be able to bring about their own liberation.

BC champions felt that Black society was divided into subgroups which would need to be united in order for the Black nation(s) to achieve true liberation. Firstly, there were the conscientised Black people who had already embraced BC ideology. Then there were a large number of complacent Black people who could be won over to BC values, and had therefore to be

enlightened so as to persuade them as to the validity of BC<sup>10</sup>. This education would entail demonstrating to them their quandary as Black people in South Africa, and infusing them with a new pride in being Black. This would happen as a result of their complete rejection of the Black feelings of inferiority which perpetuated white domination. The sensible decision to make after this educative process, it was assumed, would be commitment to Black liberation. Lastly, there were those who were Black by pigmentation, seen by BC as not Black at all but rather as a negation, and therefore labelled 'non-white'. Through their collaboration with the government and its racially oppressive system, these people had effectively placed themselves in direct antagonism to the majority of Black South Africa and had no pride in being Black. Seeing as 'Black is Beautiful', embracing those who were insistent on promoting racism (that is, South African racist whites) was cause for concern. These 'non-whites' were therefore without a place in BC because they effectively supported apartheid which BC sought to dismantle.

Black Consciousness questioned the school version of history taught to Black students. This contributed in part to a re-evaluation of aspects of Black culture, for example; Black art, music, orature, etc. As part of the move away from a white dominant culture, BC advocated an embracing of the African past. There was also an emphasis on the social organisation of pre-colonial Africa, which BC labelled African communalism, (elsewhere African socialism)<sup>11</sup>, which is a concept that Sam Nolutshungu ascribes to the writings of Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Leopold Senghor and <sup>the</sup> early Kwame Nkrumah (Nolutshungu, 1983:156 and 164).

African socialism received substantial attention in the writings of several rulers of independent Africa and although the ideas expressed were not entirely uniform, there is a clear thread of commonality. These are ideas of hospitality and concern with the general welfare of



community among Africans in the pre-colonial past. Julius Nyerere (1991) writes that the desire to accumulate wealth for personal and selfish gain,

[was] a vote of 'no confidence' in the social system. For when a society is so organised that it cares about its individuals, then, provided that he is willing to work, no individual within that society should worry about what will happen to him tomorrow if he does not hoard wealth today. Society itself should look after him, or his widow, or his orphans. That is exactly what traditional African society succeeded in doing. Both the 'rich' and the 'poor' individual were completely secure in African society (247-248).

In African socialist society everybody was a worker and it was taken for granted that each member, apart from children and the frail, would contribute towards the production of wealth (Nyerere, 1991: 248). The accumulation of wealth for personal power and usage is anti-social because it would only corrupt the individual (Nyerere, 1991: 247).

At some stage one can foresee a situation where black people will feel that they have nothing to live for and shout unto their God 'Thy will be done'. Indeed, His will shall be done but it shall not appeal equally to all mortals for indeed we have different versions of His will. If the white God has been doing the talking all along, at some stage the Black God will have to raise his voice to and make Himself heard over and above noises from His counterpart (Biko, 1987: 30).

Black Consciousness activists and writers<sup>12</sup> demonstrated suspicion in the manner in which they viewed usage of aspects from traditional African culture and languages. This was mainly because of the manner in which the apartheid State had used both to foster 'ethnic' divisions. The preferred route was that which saw values 'sifted through, so that what was thought valuable to the demands of the present could be selected and used' (M. Langa quoted in Sole, 1993:25).

Black Consciousness was highly critical of the role that Christianity had played in the control of Black people in the country. It was, however, quite aware of the importance of the religion to people and therefore sought to find an alternative to the mainstream white version of Christianity which had been used to justify first colonisation and then apartheid. The position of the Church in weakening Black people was explored, as was the role it played in maintaining their

place in the *status quo*. Biko (1987: 31) argues that the Church was successful in defeating Black liberation and aspirations thereto because preachers 'constantly urge the people to find fault in themselves and by so doing detract from the essence of struggle in which people are involved'. What was also problematised was the Christian God: the kind of God that was portrayed as content with earthly human suffering with the promise of a better life in the hereafter. Biko notes that the irony in all this is not lost to the Black youth who 'continue to drop out of Church by the hundreds' (1987: 31).

The case argued for, then, is that of Black Theology, which adapted the Christian message to the Black situation. It shaped the religion to one of relevance and suitability to the Black masses in South Africa. The resulting faith was therefore neither a rejection of Christianity, nor a wholehearted acceptance of the faith as was 'brought down' to the people. As a faith, it was partly influenced and very similar to Liberation Theology in South America; it questioned and problematised the role of the Church as legitimising oppressive powers. Liberation Theology saw faith as an essential part of a people's liberation in a 'concrete and planned way' (Sargent, 1990: 269). Due to its similarity to Liberation Theology, the possibility of influence cannot be completely dismissed. Both faiths seek to infuse Christianity with flexibility and relevance to the lives of those marginalised by society. The Christian message and Christ's life specifically are used as liberating factors<sup>13</sup>.

Biko had this to say about Black Theology:

The bible must not be seen to preach that all authority is divinely instituted. It must rather preach that it is a sin to allow yourself to be oppressed. ... This is the message implicit in 'Black Theology'. Black Theology seeks to do away with [the] spiritual poverty of the black people. It seeks to demonstrate the absurdity of the assumptions by whites that 'ancestor worship' was necessarily a superstition and that Christianity is a scientific religion (1987: 32).

Nolutshungu (1983) argues that Black Theology 'emerged to prominence in the University Christian Movement (UCM)<sup>14</sup> and was incorporated into the BCM', which was in keeping with the SASO policy to encourage Black activity (156).

## Problems with BC

I think that it is important to realise that the Black Consciousness Movement came in a cultural environment where women, whether they were Black or white, didn't matter. It wasn't a peculiarity of the Black Consciousness Movement to focus on men. ... The language didn't have space for women partly because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens<sup>15</sup>.

Firstly, BC ideology rests on the unsatisfactory premise that race is the *primary* oppressive force for all those racially subjugated in South Africa. This supposition is puzzling in that it pronounces a hierarchy of oppression(s). It is also ironic that exploring the 'primary'<sup>16</sup> oppression invariably leads to the repudiation of all other forms of oppression. This is particularly so in an ideology which expressly seeks to eliminate injustice.

There also seems to be an awkwardness around points of variation within the Black community. This attitude in turn bears directly on the refusal of BC to acknowledge that Black society is not monolithic, that experiences of oppression(s) differ within the same community. Black Consciousness proponents avoided adopting a critical stance in relation to others outside BC fighting in the struggle against apartheid. This therefore led to a situation where, in spite of its power as an ideology, the tendency to shy away from differences between Black people proved to be one of the biggest areas of weaknesses for BC. The quest for Black solidarity took precedence over the need to criticise other Black people and organisations opposed to apartheid. A press release by the SASO NEC (*SASO Newsletter* 2.1) argues this point emphatically,

With the political climate as it is today SASO expects the various political groups that operate outside the system to speak with a united voice against the present regime but not to waste time discrediting their fellow Black brothers and sisters (4).

It appears from this statement that criticism was identified as a potentially divisive tactic, and difference not explored as an area of possible strength. In its attempt to prioritise solidarity, BC denied the existence of alternative views or experiences. Perhaps this was due in part to the fact that, as Trinh T. Minh-ha insists, '[d]ifference is not difference to some ears, but awkwardness or incompleteness' (1989: 264). This means, therefore, that despite its endeavour to unite all Black South Africans, it prioritised and gave voice to a *specific* Black experience of oppression. BC presupposed also, that because all Black people experience racism, that experience is not only uniform but also that coinciding meanings stemmed from it. It further assumed and continuously asserted race as chief and perhaps sole oppressive force in South Africa for all Black people. This continued to be the case even when later class was acknowledged as an (additional) oppressive factor which existed in many Black people's lives. Due to its emphasis on racial solidarity as the only means towards the liberation of Black people, it promised complete freedom at the end from all oppressive forces despite its reluctance to acknowledge their existence. The experiences of gender, class, age, geographical location and sexual orientation were not perceived as consequential enough to warrant inclusion into the discourse of the doctrine.

In hindsight, Mamphela Ramphele writes, 'It could be argued that it was our *privileged position* in society that gave us the space to play this role' [Emphasis added] (1991b: 215); and this raises several problems in that effectively what is voiced is the *specific* oppression of relatively educated Black students (predominantly men) which forms only *part* of the overall oppression suffered by all other sectors of the Black community. In prioritising race oppression and denying the co-existence of race and other oppression in most Black subjects, Black Consciousness negates

the existence and effect of these forms of oppression on Black people's lives and trivialises the daily experiences of the millions of Black South Africans that it seeks to educate with Black Consciousness ideology. It does not acknowledge that, for instance, an old illiterate peasant woman would have a different experience of racism from a young university (male or female) student who lives in a township. This is not to say that the one experience is more important than the other; merely that an acknowledgement of this diversity would enrich the Black Consciousness analysis of oppression.

In not exploring the position from which the proponents of BC spoke, numerous conjectures were made, and the ideal of liberating the majority of Black people in the country by winning them to the Black Consciousness way of life was essentially rendered unachievable. Black Consciousness ideology arose with and out of SASO, which was a university students' structure. These young Black people, because of their university education, were not fully representative of the broad spectrum of South African Black people. Their education in a country where the majority of people were ill exposed to book education impacted on the accessibility and intellectual content of the ideology. This in turn thwarted BC's effectiveness when used with people who have not the same conceptual skills or outlooks. This should have received more attention. Merely asserting that Black students should 'consolidate themselves with the black masses, for they are black before they are students' was not sufficient to close the gap of (mis)understanding (*SASO Newsletter* vol. 2.2 1972).

The issue of communication was not the only difficulty with the ideology of Black Consciousness. There are fundamental problems with the way in which certain aspects of the positive 'self' image are positioned. The image of the African past, for instance, is that of an idyllic golden age uncorrupted by white culture. In a desperate effort to portray a past unaffected by white

values, it was presented as being without contradictions. BC, in emphasising an idyllic past uncorrupted by white presence and influence, offered no explanations or recognition for the lack of complete peaceful coexistence between Africans in the pre-colonial era. It shied away from explaining social schisms in pre-colonial culture and appeared to argue that there were no hierarchies in Southern Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans. This was done perhaps in a bid to forge a positive beginning as a point of departure for Black people. Further, BC also claimed to direct itself towards *complete* liberation. While, therefore, it seems logical to conclude that the repetition of oppressive tendencies within a liberation movement is out of place, several that appear prominently in apartheid society are duplicated within BC. For instance, patriarchal tendencies were not questioned or examined as an obstacle to liberation of all Black people. Instead, Black patriarchy was left intact. Where questioning existed, it came from some of the few women within the upper rungs of SASO and other BC organisations<sup>17</sup>.

To illustrate this point perhaps more poignantly, I will examine the claims made by those involved in or with BC structures regarding the shortcomings of the ideology that promised freedom for all Black South Africans.

Ramphele writes that '[w]omen were ... involved in the [BC] movement because they were black. Gender as a political issue was not raised at all' (1991b: 215). Kogila Moodley points to the similarities between the Black Consciousness Movement and of white society in the sexual division of labour. In both, women fit into 'domestic roles, child care, moral education, and socialisation into Black cultural heritage, health, nutrition and making clothing' (Moodley, 1991: 147). Furthermore '[t]his view of women permeated even women's self-defined roles as is evident in the Preamble to the Constitution of Allied Black Women's Federation' (Moodley, 1991: 147)<sup>18</sup>.

In an interview with Lindy Wilson, Thenjiwe Mtintso expresses related concerns when she says, '[t]hey do want you to be political, to be active, to be everything, but they still need a complement of women who are subservient' (Wilson, 1991: 60).

The role of Black women in BC was paradoxical because they were simultaneously women in a sexist organisation and accorded the status of 'honorary men'. On the one hand, they were expected to fulfil the traditional roles which many allowed themselves to be placed in. On the other hand, they were required to be militant and able to assume roles which were similar to those of the men in the movement. The latter roles meant their status ranged from being viewed as 'honorary men', supposedly different from other women because of the ability to think and participate in political debate and activity (Ramphela, 1991b: 219). Alternatively, these women could grow 'assertive, to the point of arrogance' placing themselves in direct disagreement with the taboos and limitations placed on women's behaviour<sup>19</sup> (*idem*).

BC claimed to speak for all Black people in South Africa, whilst in effect focusing mainly on the problems of reasonably educated Black men. The message carried by this sector of the Black population was significant in that it gave meaning to some of the experiences of racism and spoke very powerfully to people in the racially defined community. Without downplaying the impact of apartheid on any Black person in South Africa, it is still of paramount importance though to review the implications of speaking from the position of an educated Black male<sup>20</sup>. Because Black Consciousness activists did not take cognisance of the position from which they spoke, the Black male experience was assumed to be analogous to that of *all* Black people in apartheid South Africa.

Several South African critics have maintained that the position of educated Black men was essentially characterised by middle class bias. It is possible to place excessive emphasis on this trait by equating tertiary education with middle class status. While this writer does not intend to deny

that the two often accompany each other, and that education is often seen as a 'way out' of one's class position, it is not an inevitable fact that access to tertiary education equals middle class status. Indeed several working class tertiary students have written to challenge this 'fact'<sup>21</sup>. In addition as A. Sivanandan (1981) has repeatedly argued the connections between race and class in South Africa made South Africa 'an exceptional capitalist social formation in which race is class and class race -- and the race struggle is the class struggle.' Thus to overemphasise class differences in apartheid society is to ignore that ideology and not production relations determined racial consciousness (Sivanandan, 1981). In an earlier article, Sivanandan had spoken directly to the charge that Black intellectuals were alienated from their communities by class. He maintains, '[t]he "coloured" man [sic] ... has by virtue of his colour, an *instinct* of oppression, unaffected by his class, though muted by it' (Savanandan, 1977: 333).

That having been said, however, BC discourse negated the diversity in experiences and aspirations of Black women in all classes and working class people of both genders. At the same time, it also claimed the right to speak for them, about them and to know their experiences. Ironically, this mirrors the relationship between Black people and white liberals in South Africa. It claims privilege to speak on their behalf in a move similar to that by South African white liberals who had chosen to appropriate the voice of the Black people in this country.

The intention seems to have been to,

include as far as possible all blacks in a movement that would encompass all their concerns, political and otherwise, leaving outside only those who were irretrievably locked into collaboration roles with the 'system' (Nolutshulungu, 1983: 153).

The effect was that the ideology of Black Consciousness paid no attention to social contradictions<sup>22</sup>. This is due perhaps partly to the faulty assumption that uniformity equals unity. Kelwyn Sole (1983) problematises the representation of the African past and its role in Black



Consciousness ideology, as that of a static unchanging and therefore non-dynamic African culture which ironically coincides with the ideas of white supremacists. He further argues that the prioritization of 'the black experience' and its concomitant stressing of commonality to the exclusion of differences, 'allows cultural differences caused by class, geographic and other factors to be forgotten' (49). Exploring and exposing differences was sacrificed in favour of the pursuit of an 'unproblematic' unity.

Devan Pillay argues that the tendency to refer only to issues of race should not be surprising because '[a] simplistic racial analysis has always been the device used by one set of (male) elites fighting to replace another set of (male) elites in seats of power and privilege' (1992: 29). This writer is hesitant to label BC activists as a group of elites. Even if one is to concede that those with tertiary education (among them BC activists) were a potential elite in a post-apartheid South Africa, they were not an elite at the time. Since BC activists were not a 'set of [Black] elites fighting to replace' a white elite, the question of two sets of elites fighting for power then becomes redundant. The quotations from Sivanandan cited and discussed earlier in the chapter address themselves adequately to this charge. However, Pillay's analogy has value because it exposes the BC refusal to challenge the underlying patriarchal power base on which the movement's discourse was grounded.

Having alluded to the sexist bias of BC discourse, it now becomes mandatory to examine the precise nature and effect of the Black male bias in the ideology's language. In later chapters, when the status of Black women in BC literature is investigated, the role of language in representations of Black women will be under interrogation. It is here worth exploring the connections between silences in the discourse of BC and the treatment of women characters by BC writers.

## **The languages of Black Consciousness**

This section sets out to analyse different aspects of the relationship between BC and language. Language is used in this instance to denote both the language of the ideology (rhetoric/discourse) as well as to refer to the BC choice of language for communication. This is the motivation for the use of the plural noun 'languages' in the heading. Firstly, I will examine both the connotations and consequences of adopting English as the official language of BC. Afterwards, I will look at the message<sup>23</sup> of the discourse of BC. Incorporated into this are questions of consistency within the message of BC theory and practice, as well as the relevance of the manner of language usage. The latter will be investigated partly through an examination of the expressions of ambivalence within the discourse; the use(s) of the generic male; and the correlation of the ideology with the language of BC.

Due to the inadequate manner in which Black students were taught the English language whilst still at school, it became very difficult when students were later all of a sudden immersed in an English learning situation. As Biko (in Arnold, 1979) explains,

[y]ou understand the paragraph but you are not quite adept at reproducing an argument that was in a particular book, precisely because of your failure to understand certain words in the book (27).

In addition to this, there is a difficulty in moving beyond a certain point of comprehension, expressed by Mchunu & Mnguni thus:

The poet amongst the students [in 1976] burned the candle the whole night struggling to express his/her anger in English. The playwright's lamp ran out of paraffin as he/she was paging through the English dictionary. It was quite a task to interpret the rhythms of the anti-apartheid fight in a foreign language. For the creative writer it was a process of liberation itself to tell the oppressor in his language that blacks are no more afraid (1986: 99).

At face value the sensible choice appears to be that of an African language to prevent any difficulties arising from translation. The challenges here are numerous. In a country with ten<sup>24</sup> African languages, the issue of choice becomes a contentious one, since for practicality, as Biko explains, '[w]e cannot speak all ten at one meeting' (Arnold, 1979: 28). In addition to this was the awareness that the apartheid government had used African languages to divide Black people into Bantustans according to 'tribal' divisions. These, by and large, paralleled language lines. Second was the manner in which vernacular literature had become quite suspect, stemming partly from the fact this literature had been taken over by academics (Gwala, 1988: 85). Further, and more pertinent to the issue was the manner in which writing in indigenous languages under the Bantu education system was 'unacceptable to them as it tended to reinforce apartheid and inculcate attitudes of inferiority and dependence' (Mzamane, 1991: 179). It is against this background that the choice of English as official BC medium should be studied, although the possibility of other motivations cannot be completely discredited.

Granted, English was the language in which the writings of other Black thinkers at the time were available to BC activists<sup>25</sup>. This is therefore largely the language in which much of the theories on race, class and nationalism from elsewhere came to these activists. There is also something to be said for using as integral a part of the dominant culture's tools as a language against it<sup>26</sup>. In many cases, most notably in poetry, the English of BC was consciously different from the standard English that Black students would have been taught in school. This is particularly evident in the downright refusal to adhere to rules about formal and informal language<sup>27</sup>. The choice of English had its advantages in that it did not allow for the connotations regarding difference and division which apartheid legislation had made synonymous with African languages. It also meant that the language or version of English used could be made to subvert the biases and prejudices of the

when they are not. Lastly, she illustrates and problematises those situations where the 'generic male' clearly excludes women (Martyna, 1980: 69-70). Consequently, if 'he' and 'man' can both mean male only as well as all humanity, then women are constantly placed in a situation where there is neither certainty about what they are entitled to nor whether they are excluded.

In Black Consciousness discourse the man is in the position of 'empowered speaker' while the woman's absence from the referent is symbolic of her place in Black Consciousness thought -- which is that of the 'powerless and voiceless' who plays largely ancillary roles in BC leadership. The women who form part of the exception were often seen as 'honorary men'<sup>30</sup>.

Valerie Smith (1989) maintains that, '[w]hile the celebration of black manhood came from the need to reclaim racial pride'(60), there is a tendency to marginalise the politics of Black women. This masculinist discourse in fact inscribes the masculine experience of oppression and liberation. Black is consequently seen as male, and the struggle presented as one between the Black male and white male. In the same way that BC activists reject white liberal attempts to speak for them, it is important to note that Black men, preoccupied with their own concerns, cannot 'reproduce the exact voice of the black woman' (Smith, 1989: 63).

Similarly Dorothy Driver (1993) argues that despite BC representation of Blackness as a positive quality, it has been a Black male Consciousness; so that the onus is on Black women to form a Black women's Consciousness.

In the introduction to *The Feminist Critique of Language*, Deborah Cameron argues that language can be seen as both a reflection of sexist culture which positions the speaker and a carrier of ideas that become so familiar due to 'their constant re-enactment' that in the end we miss their relevance and significance (1992: 14). This is the case, she argues with the use of 'he' and 'man' to

symbolise humanity, which in actual fact produces the male as norm (active, present) -- woman as exception (passive, silent, other) (16).

The undeviating use of 'generic male' terms in BC, means that as part of the alienation process women are placed outside its language and discourse. By refusing to allow 'them' on the political agenda, BC rejects the politicisation of Black women's experiences since this would entail extending attention to the specific experiences of exploitation that Black women face. Exclusion from the language and space accorded to Black men directly points to Black women's secondary status within the movement. It is the ambiguous status of Black women which allows them to be silenced. Their dual positioning as women and as Black confine them to an anxiety between 'feelings of self-identity and uniqueness' and therefore similar to all the other Black people in the BC movement on the one hand, and feeling 'different' from the same group on the other (Jaworski, 1992: 37).

It is useful here to keep in mind the words of the Association for Women in Psychology quoted in Martyna that read as follows: 'We do not know, but we can guess at the psychological costs of being a non-person in one's own [in BC -- discourse of Black liberation] language' (Martyna, 1980: 76).

### **Black Consciousness and the Arts**

[F]rom the cultural vacuum created by the bannings, exile and proscription, and a literary environment which, as Richard Rive has pointed out, was virtually white by decree, writing by black South Africans re-emerged in the early seventies under white liberal patronage. However, with the resurgence of political and cultural struggle in the mid-seventies, the ruptures brought about by State repression in the discourse of resistance found communication in radically community orientated movement initiated by Black Consciousness. It was at this historical juncture that *Staffrider* appeared on the cultural scene<sup>31</sup>.

'Winter'; of our ghetto youth as in Serote's 'Alexandra', or Jigg's 'Doomfontein'; of our socially secluded miners and of our country-folks of whom much has been put down on paper; and of young politically banned student-youth leaders as in the poetry of Ilva Mackay and other young poets. Bessie Head's writings on rural Botswana are highly stimulating -- and very Black (1979:56).

The SASO Policy Manifesto (1971) had unequivocally spoken of the need for Black people to be self-defined. This was extended to include the manner in which characters in the art of BC writers were to take shape. Furthermore, Kelwyn Sole (1993: 59) argues that 'the literature of Black Consciousness allowed the expression of frustration and anger of individual black writers to appear in a form which could be communicated and shared'<sup>34</sup>. Miriam Tlali (in Seroke, 1981) maintains, 'What I believe is that we can never be writers unless we reflect the true position of what is taking place and to carry the reader along with us' (43).

There was an emphasis on Black art forms such as orature which led to the popularity of poetry recitals and drama at the time. Oral renditions were well suited to the political atmosphere for several reasons. One was that while written works of art, compilations, and so on were likely to fall under the influence of the Censorship Board, it was infinitely more difficult to ban oral material. This meant therefore that artists could at once fulfil their need for self-expression and avoid the possible consequence of censorship. Poetry and drama also were economical alternatives to lengthy prose writing which required more time than could be afforded such tasks (Shava, 1989: 99).

Vusi D. Mchunu and Herbert Mbukeni Mnguni (1986) argue that the prioritization of poetry was a political statement in that it broke the divide between writer and reader, was easier to remember because it could be dramatised, and was more direct along with escaping censorship quite successfully. Poetry was the easy choice because as Mafika Gwala argues,

if one has to put down the goings-on of the country more clearly, poetry is the best medium for this. When you face a truth, there is a challenging need to express it, you can most emphatically express it through poetry, because there is no way you can twist it about in a poem. You have to bring out the truth as it is, or people will see through your lies. It is also through poetry that you find, more soberly, that

there has never been such a thing as pure language. That only academic fallacy can create and defend such abstraction. You thus cannot be disturbed by academics who claim an almost sacerdotal authority over black writing (1988: 83).

Several writers have explained that short stories and poetry as creative forms were not as demanding physically, hence their prominence in the writing of this era (Rive, 1982; Vaughan, 1981). Vaughan has said of the short story as a form: 'it is brief, pithy, immediate: it requires a relatively small space of privacy' (1981: 45). Shorter creative forms were suitable for their ability to avoid censorship better than novels as well as their ability to be completed and distributed within a short space of time.

Later, however, the government took to banning the artists rather than their works. BC art was, in keeping with the broader (BC) political agenda, critical of liberal artists and art in South Africa. This tradition with its negative portrayal of the Black character was rejected as vehemently as white supremacist literature<sup>35</sup>. As Mafika Gwala argues, there was a need for Black writers to create new ways of writing about Black people in South Africa. There was a need for portrayals of 'fully-fledged human beings' and a move away from the type of caricatured representation found in white writing (1988: 87).

The writers of this time were highly critical of white standards of measuring the worth of literature. Such an impulse was seen as part of the oppressive, prescriptive status quo. Don Mattera (1988) argues:

Literature as armament for liberation will remain with us for as long as oppression and exploitation exist. Conversely, the literature of the privileged/ruling class is contrived to perpetuate the status quo through the indoctrination of its own class or systematic (and sophisticated) repression of the masses. In the literature of the privileged there is always room for romance, room for Wilbur Smith, Lessing, Michener and Barbara Cartland; room for those sensuously provocative bedside novels and tales of feminist trials (2-3).

there has never been such a thing as pure language. That only academic fallacy can create and defend such abstraction. You thus cannot be disturbed by academics who claim an almost sacerdotal authority over black writing (1988: 83).

Several writers have explained that short stories and poetry as creative forms were not as demanding physically, hence their prominence in the writing of this era (Rive, 1982; Vaughan, 1981). Vaughan has said of the short story as a form: 'it is brief, pithy, immediate: it requires a relatively small space of privacy' (1981: 45). Shorter creative forms were suitable for their ability to avoid censorship better than novels as well as their ability to be completed and distributed within a short space of time.

Later, however, the government took to banning the artists rather than their works. BC art was, in keeping with the broader (BC) political agenda, critical of liberal artists and art in South Africa. This tradition with its negative portrayal of the Black character was rejected as vehemently as white supremacist literature<sup>35</sup>. As Mafika Gwala argues, there was a need for Black writers to create new ways of writing about Black people in South Africa. There was a need for portrayals of 'fully-fledged human beings' and a move away from the type of caricatured representation found in white writing (1988: 87).

The writers of this time were highly critical of white standards of measuring the worth of literature. Such an impulse was seen as part of the oppressive, prescriptive status quo. Don Mattera (1988) argues:

Literature as armament for liberation will remain with us for as long as oppression and exploitation exist. Conversely, the literature of the privileged/ruling class is contrived to perpetuate the status quo through the indoctrination of its own class or systematic (and sophisticated) repression of the masses. In the literature of the privileged there is always room for romance, room for Wilbur Smith, Lessing, Michener and Barbara Cartland; room for those sensuously provocative bedside novels and tales of feminist trials (2-3).



This to a large extent echoes sentiment expressed by other authors in Africa at various times<sup>36</sup>. It therefore seems that the sentiment is that any of the things that white society deems important or significant, are automatically up for rebuttal by BC writers and criticism. This becomes a double edged sword when one considers the fact that feminist issues are relegated to the same status as romance novels. If this was intended as a criticism on the feminism of white South Africa specifically up to that point, which effectively ignored the issues of race and class in women's lives, this attitude would have some value. However, the contempt demonstrated here is a commentary on all anti-sexist theorisation. This is so because voices like Manoko Nchwe who advocates a certain kind of 'women's liberation' movement adapted to the needs of Black South African women, are in the minority (Nchwe quoted in Boitumelo, 1979). This is a fact which becomes clear from the manner in which women characters are treated in the *Staffrider* short stories. Later on in this examination of BC literature, I will examine the attitudes of *Staffrider* writers to gender in more detail.

The literature produced at this time was characterised by innovation. It was almost unanimous in its tendency to adapt writing style, character portrayal, language adaptation to suit the author and audience's needs. Indeed Mothobi Mutloatse announced, 'We would like to determine our future concerning what is happening here ... It's a new language we are creating' (Seroke, 1981b: 43). The message to the white academic establishment was clear: the position that the Black writer found him/herself in was not brought about through his/her own free will. The Black South African writer was only concerned with Black opinion<sup>37</sup>. There was no mincing of words regarding what the writers set out to do:

We will have to *donder* conventional literature: old fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through: we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the

critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true selves -- undergoing a self discovery as a people.

We are not going to be told how to relive our feelings; pains and aspirations by anybody who speaks from the platform of his own rickety culture. We'll write our poems in narrative form; we'll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we'll dramatise our poetic experiences; we'll poeticise our historical dramas. We will do all these things at the same time.

We'll perform all these exciting, painful, therapeutic and educative creative arts until we run out of energy! (Mutloatse, 1980: 5)

### **Staffrider Magazine**

The brainchild of Mike Kirkwood, then newly-appointed manager of Ravan Press, and Mothobi Mutloatse, a journalist and writer who later became the manager of Skotaville Publishers, *Staffrider* was published by Ravan Press, one of the white-owned publishing houses that 'were willing to take the risk of incurring the displeasure of the government censors' (Mzamane, 1991: 183).

The first editorial of *Staffrider* (March 1978) identified the magazine as a '*skelm* of sorts'. Its name was adopted from the commuters who 'ride staff' (ride illegally) on the trains between the Johannesburg city centre and the townships. The magazine was named after part of 'the black experience'. This move testified to the magazine's non-tokenistic attitude towards Black writers. It was expected to take the same kind of risks with the law as its namesakes (Kirkwood, 1980: 23). Additionally, Nick Visser (1989) argues that the magazine 'helped to create, not just disseminate, the vibrant writing of the late seventies and early eighties' (42). *Staffrider* published many emerging Black writers alongside with established writers. Mbulelo Mzamane (1991) argues that the magazine was 'the most representative literary magazine of the Soweto era, the high-water mark of the Black Consciousness period'<sup>38</sup>. In like vein Richard Rive in a historical overview of 'Books By Black Writers', conflates Black Consciousness Writing with what he terms '[t]he *Staffrider* school' (1982: 12). Many writers whose work is analysed here aligned themselves with Black Consciousness explicitly. Others aligned themselves with the ideals of BC art<sup>39</sup>. Njabulo Ndebele, in

an interview with Jane Wilkinson (1992), admits to not only the influences of Black Consciousness on his politics and writings, but also speaks of the direct link between the body of art and *Staffrider*. He argues that *Staffrider* gave an 'organised voice' to the emerging body of Black Consciousness influenced art in South Africa (Wilkinson, 1992: 151). Ndebele further testifies to the wide existence of 'cultural groups' aligned to BC which found a publishing outlet in *Staffrider*<sup>40</sup>. However, there are writers who contributed to *Staffrider*, who did not proceed to publish much elsewhere. I have found no evidence of the writers/poets explicitly attesting to their decisions to embrace BC as an ideology or the dictates of BC literature. While this would establish the connection between the writers whose works are studied here beyond a doubt, several literary critics have suggested that this is not entirely necessary. Rather that many of those associated with the *Staffrider* project have repeatedly attested to the connections between the literary magazine and Black Consciousness is sufficient to attest to these influences.

A. P. Foulkes argues strongly for the historical reception of art to be relevant in the manner in which critics study and analyse art. While he concedes that 'the immediate historical reception of a text can[not] co-determine its meaning for all time', he insists on the need to examine literature bearing in mind its historical reception (1983: 73). Furthermore, Foulkes insists that when literature attempts to achieve more than 'art for art's sake'<sup>41</sup>, it often assumes a place where it 'can be regarded as expressing "logical propositions"' (*idem*). Foulkes' analysis is in keeping with the manner in which Black contributors to the magazine *Staffrider* (often BC writers/poets) conceptualised the role of their art<sup>42</sup>.

Myriam Diaz-Diocatretz argues for the influence of what she terms 'the unuttered context of life' (1989: 134). This allows for writers and readers to be bound by an interaction informed by accepted assumptions in the construction and interpretation of art. Furthermore,

It is socially objective, that is, it does not originate in the individual; therefore the evaluation is not a singular one, but corresponds rather to a given commonality. In a general sense, it can contain the implied 'atmosphere of shared feeling,' of support of a given period, or artistic movement; or from a given collective according to a specific cultural sphere ... or to a specific race classeme ... or to a specific nation of continent ... or according to a specific class. *The wider the range of the shared viewpoint and the wider the social group, the more general and constant the entythème appears in the implied elements of the utterance* (Diaz-Diocaretz, 1989: 134-135) [Emphasis added].

From Diaz-Diocaretz's argument it becomes possible, based on the pervasive awareness and/or influence of BC in *Staffrider* discussed above, among artists and audiences alike, to read the connection between the literature studied here and the ideology of Black Consciousness as established. BC can be read as the 'shared viewpoint' in *Staffrider*, as many cited above have testified<sup>43</sup>.

Foulkes' and Diaz-Diocaretz's arguments operate along similar lines to what Raymond Williams (1977) termed 'structures of feeling'. Williams argues for the existence of a 'particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period' (1977: 131). These structures of feeling 'do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action' (1977: 132).

Black Consciousness activists were outspoken on the attempts of BC literature to effect change in society by influencing directly the behaviour or actions of their audiences. The audiences and writers of BC literature were privy to 'the more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences' (*idem*). For Williams defining and recognising structures of feeling means acknowledging and defining 'forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social material process' (133).

Structures of feeling are set up and maintained by the presence of ‘particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and, in what are often its most recognisable forms, particular deep starting-points and conclusions’ (134).

Structures of feeling can be applied to *Staffrider* in several ways. They influenced the contributions to the magazine by Black artists in the explicitly stated link between the magazine and BC. When contributing to the magazine therefore artists were aware of this dynamic and contributing to it. Thus because *Staffrider* published much BC literature, artists were participating in the ways in which their work may be read. Additionally, because the goals of BC literature were constantly discussed by the writers themselves (within the pages of *Staffrider* and without), the target audiences were aware of the aims of the literature to structure and modify Black thought and behaviour. Williams’ structures of feeling therefore fed into not only the ways in which Black art published in *Staffrider* was framed by the artists themselves, it also can be used to explain the ways in which this art was then in turn interpreted and framed by the audiences of the magazine.

The first edition of *Staffrider* was banned<sup>44</sup>. This issue carried a series of personal testimonies of ordinary people who lived in Soweto, a way of turning ‘every man [sic] into an author’ (Oliphant, 1991: 352). *Staffrider* had Black and white writers publishing in it, although the orientation was more towards publication of the new Black literature and reception by a Black audience. It provided a forum where less established writers and community groups could publish work side-by-side with the better known, more proven writers. According to Mafika Gwala (1988), it was easy for Black people to contribute to *Staffrider* because there was no fear of editorial censorship. Part of the attraction to publish in *Staffrider* stemmed from the knowledge that, ‘[t]o be published in *Staffrider* is to be *read* -- more widely, we reckon, than literary artists have ever been read in South Africa’ (Gwala, 1979: 58).

In keeping with many of the ideals of Black Consciousness and the writing it gave rise to, the first issue of *Staffrider* proudly announced in its introductory note that,

The new writing has altered the scope and function of literature in South Africa in ways we have still to discover. The aim of this magazine is not to impose 'standards' but to provide a regular meeting place for the new writers and their readers, a forum which will help to shape the future of our literature. A feature of much of the new writing is its 'direct line' to the community in which the writer lives. This is a two-way line. The writer is attempting to voice the community's experience ('This is how it is') and his immediate audience is the community ('Am I right?') (1).

It initially had a self-editing policy<sup>45</sup> to encourage the new writing emerging at the time, although in 1980 Chris van Wyk, a Black poet was appointed by the *Staffrider* board thereby terminating this policy. In the Preface to the *Staffrider* anniversary publication, Andries Walter Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic (1988) maintain that the editing process later gave way for 'a more rigorous selection process, coupled with criticism and workshop discussion to improve the overall quality of the work'<sup>46</sup>.

The April/May 1981 issue of the magazine saw the first of a column titled 'Staffworker', which focused on the struggle in the workplace. 'Staffworker' was a documentation of the Black person's experience at work. This signified the recognition of the labour movement and class issues as central to the experience of oppression, which necessitated the realisation that these issues were an integral part of the 'black experience'.

In its ten years before it was taken over by Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), *Staffrider* managed to challenge not only the censorship laws<sup>47</sup> but also institutionalised literary conventions. It was remarkable in that it actively contributed to the nature and direction of literature in South Africa, whilst engaging in dialogue with other genres and disciplines emerging at the time<sup>48</sup>. *Staffrider* was able to carry out the self-affirming task of expediting the active participation of the public in the documentation of history, whilst supplying a platform from which

artists of all kinds could directly engage and contest prevailing notions of art (Oliphant & Vladislavic, 1988). In 1988 when Andries Walter Oliphant took over the editorial task, he established links with COSAW, from which many of the people on the editorial board came (Oliphant, 1991: 356).

The material published in the magazine was in keeping with the general aims of BC literature. Oliphant and Vladislavic (1988) argue that Black Consciousness as the prevailing ideology of the time of *Staffrider*'s appearance 'permeated the editorial policy and therefore the contents of the magazine'<sup>49</sup>. Indeed, many an artist and/or group declared their commitment to this effect in a statement published in the magazine. The Creative Youth Association (CYA) ended a note to introduce themselves to the *Staffrider* readership with a note by declaring that:

When you know who you are then you know where you are in reference to others around and on top of you. OUR MAIN WAR -- TO BRING SELF AWARENESS TO OUR PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY ARTISTS. 'Let nothing separate creativity from the artist' (*Staffrider* 1.1: 32) [Emphasis in original].

Similarly, the GUYO Book Club announced,

We vow to be part of the struggle -- the struggle of creating and promoting African literature, and we wish and hope to end this decade with a high literary development in this part of the continent (*Staffrider* 2.2: 31).

The establishment of a 'Women Writers Speak' column in *Staffrider* in November/December 1979 meant that, for the first time in the two years in which the publication had been in circulation, an explicitly female voice was made audible. This is not to downplay the importance of Miriam Tlali's column 'Soweto Speaking', a regular feature in the magazine, or the submissions by women to the pages of the magazine thus far. While these are evidence of important and ground-breaking work, they did not explicitly explore the role or position of the woman writer specifically. However, the 'Women Writers Speak' column provided the first declaration of 'women writers' commitment. In it, several women writers voiced their opinions on their role as Black women writers.

For the writer Manoko Nchwe,

An African woman writer has some priority in building herself to develop in her community: irrespective of the form of her art. Such a woman has a duty to trace the remains of her distorted culture, put them together and nourish them to be part of her<sup>50</sup>.

The role of the woman writer is here seen as a custodian of a lost (or rapidly disappearing) culture. Hers is to seek the affirmation of her community. In addition to this, she needs to give 'a direction' to the listener/reader of her words. It is Nchwe's opinion that a woman in her capacity as 'a mother in her society, as the first teacher to her children and also an ordinary member of society is in a very good position to communicate with the people she writes for' (60). It appears from her assertion that the responsibility of a woman writer extends beyond her writing projects; that in a sense she is to mother her society, partly through teaching. This multi-faceted position is that which equips her with the ability to communicate with her readership as successfully as she does. What of the male writer then, since he is supposedly as effective, a factor which Nchwe herself alludes to when she speaks of Mtutuzeli Matshoba's words? Why does he not need to act in the same capacity to be as successful in his writing? Despite these inconsistencies it appears that Nchwe is, however, aware of the various factors which work to discourage women writing and publishing. She feels that contact between women writers may serve to encourage more to write, and to write more frequently. She speaks highly of Miriam Tlali's multi-pronged writing projects. It is as much Tlali's own writing and her recording of others' voices for which she is commended here. In her writing, Miriam Tlali expresses not only herself, but allows others (who do not have the same access to writing as she) to come to voice.

It is important for women writers to write about those things which are important to them. These will inevitably include their own lives. Nchwe is outspoken about what she identifies as the need for women writers to be enlightened through 'self-discovery'. This is a concept she uses to



mean 'making other women aware of their value to the society, and how much they have to offer in all areas' (60).

It is important for a woman to write of the Black women's experience and this will enable for instance a 'woman in Soweto to understand what a woman in Gugulethu says' (60). Part of this is to 'clarify the position of a woman in her society -- and the only person who can do this is woman herself' (60-1). Indeed, Nchwe asserts that it is part of the woman writer's purpose to ensure that '[t]he myth of female inferiority should be completely discouraged' (61).

In the same article, acknowledging the need for African women to draw on the 'ideology of women's liberation', Nchwe proceeds to question the manner in which this ideology 'combines with our distorted culture' (61). She announces that she does not know how this is to come about. Nonetheless, this introduces the possibility that feminist theory/ideology would need to be made relevant to the situation at hand. After all, Nchwe announces, 'I do not expect a woman in South Africa to have the same demands as an American woman, as here the movement is still young' (60).

In the same article Boitumelo declares that

Women's liberation is beyond the relationship between man and woman. It is beyond being freed from man's oppression, but it is the first phase of our struggle to reaffirm our role in the struggle for total liberation (61).

Accompanying these women's voices and declarations are poems by and about Black women in *Staffrider*. In the main, they portray women as mothers responsible for their families, suffering because of the effects of apartheid on their families. The poet Ntombiyakhe kaBiyela kaXhoka merges the role of the Black woman with the mother Africa trope when she ends her poem:

I'm black  
I'm me  
I've blood --  
Red blood -- not ink  
Let me be

Let me be

There are no poems crooning

Sweet nothings

These are my feelings

my fears

my pride

my life

my very own

These are about my environment

my people

my experiences

myself

I'm me

I'm Afrika<sup>51</sup>

This poem combines the speaker's role as a creator (poet) with that of the mother Africa trope. It is perhaps a fitting end to the chapter in that it introduces the themes in the chapters to follow. The other three poems<sup>52</sup>, 'Courage, African Woman', 'My Tears' and the Untitled poem by Winnie Morolo, Manoko and Boitumelo respectively also go some way towards securing women as tormented mothers<sup>53</sup>.

In the February 1980 issue Nokugcina Sigwili (later known as Gcina Mhlophe) echoes some of the sentiments expressed by Boitumelo and Manoko Nchwe. Sigwili too feels the need for women to write about a woman's experience of life. She feels, like Nchwe, that female creativity can take place in a communal setting and that this would serve to encourage prospective writers. Women's status as mothers is also highlighted by Sigwili to the point where it is seen as essential for manhood to exist. While men draw strength from their physical strength, Sigwili announces that, 'our strength as women is our motherhood: men are always women's children. And their manhood doesn't show if women aren't there' (44). Sigwili appears here to be arguing that women are important in part to ensure that men show their 'manhood'. Conversely, women's strength derives from the female ability to reproduce and be a mother. In both instances of strength outlined

by Sigwili, women do not appear to need to be strong for themselves. Nor is it important for men to allow women to show their 'womanhood', whatever that means. Although then, by Sigwili's argument, men need women for strength and definition, women are self-sufficient. What Sigwili expresses here is in keeping with the representation of Black women in the following chapter. The authors whose works are examined in chapter 2 seem to be in agreement with Sigwili's assertion. The problems and implications of this perception are dealt with in detail in the following chapter.

Amelia House, writing from exile, interrogates the relevance of a women's page. She recognises that there are aspects of women's lives which only women can write about and that a women's page may pave some way towards establishing a female presence in the publication. On the other hand, however, she illustrates the manner in which this tendency can be counterproductive and limiting, especially since much of the discussion of women writers' roles has centred around mothering. She ends her contribution with the assertion that, 'For the present it is necessary to observe that women do write and that there is diversity in their writing'<sup>54</sup>.

Miriam Tlali argues that she needed to be all that she could be to enable her to write. Having 'reconciled' herself to all of these things, she maintains that for her 'it was quite a task to write' (Seroke, 1981: 43). She has also tried to organise for prospective women writers to come together. She has realised that '[y]ou find that they have all the willingness to try and write but they are not able to do it because of all these impediments' (Seroke, 1981: 43).

## Conclusion

In 'Staffrider Workshop' (July/August 1979) the BC activist and poet Mafika Gwala explicitly points to those aspects which prove that Black writing in South Africa at the time had 'a commonness of theme, approach and overall expression that transcends style and the individual's manner of thinking' (55). This theme is one which, Gwala argues, is due to the commitment of

these writers to seek a Black inspiration for their work. In other words, '[t]hey have simply gravitated to black awareness. Not for literary purposes. *But because this black awareness is their experience*' (55) [Emphasis added].

The theme of commitment to portray realistic and 'positive' characters is one which receives mention from artists of both genders published in *Staffrider*. It is clear, however, that the positive characterisation may be open to each writer's interpretation. What implications does this have for Black women characters? It is clear that the ideal role of Black women within BC organisations and rhetoric is marked largely by silence and absence. Where women like Mamphela Ramphele questioned the prescriptions placed on female behaviour, they were the exception and in the minority. It is equally clear from the declarations of some of the women writers that silence and suffering are to be some of the main positions allocated to Black women usually in their status as mothers.

The following chapters analyse the manner in which both male and female BC writers portray Black women characters. Since there appears to be a unanimous commitment to present positive images of Blackness, the manifestations of this 'positive' characterisation will receive intensive interrogation.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Sibisi (1991): 133.
- <sup>2</sup> Buthelezi quotes Biko as saying, 'So what happened was that in 1960, effectively all black resistance was killed, and the stage was left open to whites of liberal opinion to make representations for blacks, in a way that had not happened before in the past, unaccompanied by black opinion' (1991: 112).
- <sup>3</sup> In Arnold (1979): xvi-xvii.
- <sup>4</sup> In Wilson (1991): 22.
- <sup>5</sup> Budlender reviews the 'impotence and ineffectiveness' of liberal discourse for gaining or handling power (1991: 229). This therefore meant that since South African liberals had no strategy for assuming a powerful presence within government, liberal politics took the form of symbolic protest. Black Consciousness identified symbolic protest as ineffective
- <sup>6</sup> An anonymous note posted on the University of Natal Black Section and published in the *SASO Newsletter* vol. 2.2 March/ April 1972 reads, 'What the black students should do is to consolidate together with the black masses, for they are Black before they are students, and devise strategies to counteract the forces of whiteness' (9).
- <sup>7</sup> See Frank Talk's (Steve Biko) 'I Write What I Like', *SASO Newsletter* 2.1:  
 I now say to black people that there is no need for spurious political coalitions.  
 That any hope that co-operating with whites will ever bring you anything is a pipe-dream. Papering over cracks is a sure way of political rigor mortis (10).
- <sup>8</sup> In Ramphela (1991a): 156.
- <sup>9</sup> For a more detailed account of some of the BCP's activities, see Mamphela Ramphela's 'Empowerment and Symbols of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development' in Pityana, B. and M. Ramphela et al. (eds). (*op cit.*).
- <sup>10</sup> Steve Biko in *I Write What I Like* (32) argues that,  
 in all fields *BLACK* Consciousness seeks to talk to the Black man in a language that is his own. It is only by recognising the basic set-up in the Black world that one will come to realise the urgent need for the re-awakening of the sleeping masses. Black Consciousness seeks to do this.
- <sup>11</sup> Steve Biko in *I Write What I Like* (30) writes that,  
 [t]he oneness of community for instance is at the heart of our culture. The easiness with which Africans communicate with each other is not forced by authority but is inherent in the make up of African people. Thus whereas the white family can stay in an area without knowing its neighbours, Africans develop a sense of belonging to the community within a short time of coming together. Many a hospital official has been confounded by the practice of Indians who give gifts and presents to patients whose names they can hardly recall. Again this is a manifestation of the interrelationship between man and man in the Black world as opposed to the highly impersonal world in which Whitey lives.
- <sup>12</sup> This is a somewhat artificial split since some were both activist and writers. Because this was not always the case this statement is meant to include those from both camps. Mongane Wally Serote in an interview with Jaki Seroke (1981a) points to this situation where the writer is both an artist and an activist in BC. In another interview Sipho Sepamla, Miriam Tlali and Mothobi Mutloatse echo Serote's sentiments to Seroke (1981b).

along the lines of class, gender, age and geographical location that need to be taken seriously in developmental strategies [Emphasis added].

<sup>21</sup> See the following compilations by working class women: *The Common Thread: Writings by Working Class Women* (Mandarin, 1989); *Life As We Know It* (Virago, 1977); *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (Virago, 1978), *Home Girls* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), *This Bridge Called My Back* (Persephone, 1981).

<sup>22</sup> In Ramphele (1991a): 177-78.

<sup>23</sup> Message here is used to refer to both the content as well as the implications of the choice of discourse.

<sup>24</sup> I refer here to the ten of the eleven official languages of South Africa. I exclude English from this list, hence the number ten. I recognise, however, that there are many of the Khoi and San languages are either extinct or facing extinction. I do not therefore mean to imply that they are not African languages. Instead, I refer here to the ten dominant ones, i.e. isiXhosa, isiZulu, isiNdebele, isiSwati, seSotho, seTswana, sePedi, Afrikaans, Tsonga and Venda.

<sup>25</sup> I refer specifically to the literature of liberation which circulated and was popular in BC circles at the time. This includes the translated writings of Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Paul Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Mao Zedong, Antonio Gramsci, and Amílcar Cabral, among others. I refer also to the writings of the Black Power Movement, Malcolm X, etc.

<sup>26</sup> BC activists and writers were clearly not in agreement with Audre Lorde who said, 'Survival is not an academic skill [...] It is learning to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never allow us to bring about genuine change' (quoted in Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983: 99).

<sup>27</sup> The distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' language usage works on several levels. The writing of the time, be it political sloganeering, poetry, drama or short stories deliberately flaunts the conventions of language as taught in the classroom situation. For instance the distance between standard (formal) and colloquial (informal) modes is blurred. Secondly, the rules of language that govern appropriate circumstances for the various codes or dialects were overturned. This often breaks down the lines between formal articles and informal writing. This tendency will be discussed at length in the chapters that follow; especially because of its importance and prevalence in the expression of the time.

<sup>28</sup> Kelwyn Sole uses the example of the slogan 'Black is Beautiful' to illustrate this point (1993:81).

<sup>29</sup> See the interview with Mamphela Ramphele attached in the Appendix B. I wish to reiterate here what Dr Ramphele states there in addition to this observation. This is not to say that there is no sexism in Black society, simply that the sexism is not mirrored in language in a similar manner. South African indigenous languages have a different language gender system from English. (I use 'gender' here in its grammatical meaning as well as in the social sense.) The gender bias becomes obvious in sociolinguistic analyses, and does not exist at purely grammatical technique. A sociolinguistic analysis would reveal '*isihlonipha*' which is a linguistic system influenced in part by the gender of the speaker. However, the point that Ramphele makes refers to the absence of a grammatical gender bias. There is no equivalent 'generic' noun (such as 'man', or 'mankind') in African languages. Since pronouns are not marked by gender, it is impossible to say 'he' because the equivalent means 'he or she'.

<sup>30</sup> The term 'honorary men' is one which Mamphela Ramphele has used extensively in writing about women in BC specifically as well as more generally the phenomenon which sees women treated as men when they are what she calls 'political widows'. For more detailed exploration of this theme, see Mamphela Ramphele's article 'The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View' in N. B. Pityana & Mamphela Ramphele et al (eds) *Bounds of Possibility op cit.* See also her interview with Kimberley A. Yates and Pumla Dineo Gqola in Appendix B, and Ramphele's article 'Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity', *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Art and Sciences* 125(1), Winter 1996: 99-117.

Whenever women involved in early Black Consciousness are mentioned (and this is not often) it is the same names that receive mention. These are Nomsisi Kraai, Deborah Matshoba, Mamphela Ramphele, Brigitte Mabandla, Vuyi Mashalaba and Winnie Kgare, the first president of BPC. Equally noticeable is the paucity of written material both on and by these women, especially in the face of the abundance of material on and by their male contemporaries. Ramphele is a notable exception in that she has not only continuously refused to be ignored, silenced or wished away, but has rightly continued to assert her presence and accept her share of the credit.

<sup>31</sup> Andries Walter Oliphant in his 'Comment' to *Staffrider* Vol. 7.1 (1988).

<sup>32</sup> In an interview with Jaki Seroke, Mongane Serote echoes this sentiment (*Staffrider* April/May 1981: 30-31). See also Sepamla's similar comments in 'Black Writers in South Africa', a joint interview with Miriam Tlali and Mothobi Mutloatse by Jaki Seroke published in *Staffrider* November 1981.

<sup>33</sup> The acclaimed actor John Kani in an Interview with Andries Walter Oliphant (1988) in *Staffrider* 7.1: 55 expresses this need thus:

I have a responsibility to participate in the war for reclaiming our right to the land and everything that accompanies it, whatever happens. ... This is to ensure that my work complements the imperatives of our enfolding political struggle. This precludes involvement in any project which might lend credibility to the ruling group and its institutions.

<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in an interview with Jaki Seroke, Miriam Tlali expresses what she sees to be the right of Black writers to write whatever and however they feel justified by themselves and Black audiences.

<sup>35</sup> Mattera, Don. 1988. 'Literature for Liberation', *Matatu* 2.3 - 4: 4:

White literature or the literature of the Privileged, as I wish to call it, portrayed the black man as a scheming, degenerate and sequacious native whose main aim was (is) to sexually seduce white women and scare their children.

<sup>36</sup> I am thinking here of Chinua Achebe's remark, 'Art for art's sake is just another piece of deodorised dog-shit', in *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (19) and Joseph Okpaku's statement to a similar effect:

The present practice of judging African Literature by Western standards is not only invalid, it is also potentially dangerous to the development of African arts. It presupposes that the western approach is the only African writing. Consequently, good African writing is taken to be that which most approximates to western literature. *New African Literature and the Arts* (139)

<sup>37</sup> Several BC writers have made this clear in interviews. See interviews conducted by Seroke with Serote (1981a) and Tlali, Mutloatse and Sepamla (1981b). See also Chapman (1982: 113); Rive

(1982, 14); Matshoba (1979, x); Vaughan (1979, 47); Martins (1981); Lucas Seage (in Koloane, 1981); Nchwe and Boitumelo (in Boitumelo, 1979).

38 In Mzamane (1991): 182.

39 Furthermore many of the writers who published their works in *Staffrider* aligned themselves with Black Consciousness. Serote has done so repeatedly (Chapman, 1982; Seroke, 1981a, Wilkinson, 1992); Tlali, Sepamla and Mutloatse admitted to being Black Consciousness writers to Seroke (1981b); Manoko Nchwe, Boitumelo [Mofokeng] and Sizakele identified their writing as BC (Boitumelo, 1979), etc. Mafika Pascal Gwala was a SASO activist and writer who contributed to *Staffrider*. Rive (1982) lists the following poets/writers as self-identified BC writers: Mafika Gwala, Sipho Sepamla, James Matthews (after the publication of *Pass Me a Meatball*, Jones, 1977), Mongane Wally Serote, Christopher van Wyk, Fazel Johennesse, Es'kia Mphahlele (after the publication of *Chirundu*, 1979), Miriam Tlali, Ahmed Essop, Neil Williams, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, and Mothobi Mutloatse. To the BC list of writers Serote adds Oswald Mtshali and Richard Rive's later works (Seroke, 1981a). Dikobe WaMogale Martins aligns himself with the same BC literary output (Martins, 1981). These writers contributed to *Staffrider*. Some of their works are analysed in this dissertation. However, there are others who belonged to art groups who pledged allegiance to BC such as the GUYO group, etc.

40 Essop Patel, speaking to Jane Wilkinson about his work, also acknowledges the influences of BC on his work in the 1970s. See Wilkinson, 1992: 162.

41 He sees 'art for arts' sake approach' as something 'one-sided' that literature 'degenerate[s]' into (1983: 78).

42. Rive (1982) insists that BC writers (calling them 'the *Staffrider* school') wrote for Black audiences with clear didactic and modeling goals in mind. He adds that this was accompanied by a 'rediscovery and reassessment of the Black identity' (13). Similarly, Peter Wilhelm (1982) argues that BC poetry 'found an outlet' in *Staffrider*. Sepamla speaks of the challenges posed by writers to the audiences attempting the elimination of self-hate; Tlali speaks of her decision to write for Black audiences as her contribution to 'the process of change in this country'; and Mutloatse speaks of BC literature as relevant and suited to the times (Seroke, 1981b). Vaughan speaks of Matshoba's stories (framed as BC) as giving counsel on ways to behave. Bicca Mintu Maseko (1981) and Lucas Seage (in Koloane, 1981) echo Martins (1981) on the need to 'put that creative spirit at the service of the struggle' (1981: 31).

43 She uses the following quotation from V. N. Volochinov [M.M. Bakhtin]'s 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of Sociological Poetics' (1926):

If an evaluation is in reality conditioned by the very being of a collective, then it is accepted dogmatically as something understood and not subject to discussion (Diaz-Diocaretz, 1989: 136).

44 See 'An Open Letter to the Publication Directorate from the Publishers', in *Staffrider* May/June 1978.

45 The editorial to the first issue of *Staffrider* emphasises its role as a forum for 'the great surge of creative activity which has been one of the more hopeful signs of the times' (1). The self editing stance was because the new literature was identified as challenging notions of form and function for literature, and it was left up to the groups or individuals submitting work for publication to have edited the material. It had no editor or editorial board in the conventional sense at this stage.

46 In Oliphant and Vladislavic (1988): ix.



47 See 'Open Letter to the Publication Directorate from the Publishers', in *Staffrider* May/June 1978.

48 Oliphant and Vladislavic (1988) maintain in their 'Preface' to *Ten Years of Staffrider* that, [t]he magazine has interacted with all significant political and historical developments of the past ten years. The interaction is reflected in a diverse range of artistic and literary modes: popular history, performance poetry, social realist fiction, popular music, committed art, documentary photography, and generic hybrids (like the 'proemdra') of a scope, depth and radical orientation not to be found in any other cultural magazine in circulation during the same period (ix).

49 In Oliphant and Vladislavic (1988): ix.

50 See Nchwe in *Staffrider* November/December 1979: 60.

51 Ntombiyakhe Biyela kaXhoka published this poem in the 'Women Writers Speak' column in *Staffrider* November/December 1979. It is worth mentioning that it is the same column from which Manoko Nchwe and Boitumelo's remarks (quoted earlier in the chapter) are extracted.

52 The poems referred to here were published in *Staffrider* November/December 1979: 60-1.

53 I am aware that there are complexities in the motif of the mother in Black South African women's writing: that the presence of a suffering mother does not necessarily always confine the woman in question to the patriarchal role of mothering. This is a theme I have explore elsewhere. (See my 'Reconsidering Motherhood in the autobiographies of Ellen Kuzwayo and Emma Mashinini' Conference paper published in *Inter Action* 4.) Although I do not intend to dispute the existence and harmful effect of the mother Africa trope, I suggest in that paper (in reference to two specific writers) that there is evidence to suggest a (deliberate) re-writing of the theme of motherhood by some Black South African women.

54 See Amelia House in *Staffrider* September/October 1980: 46.

## Chapter 2:

### **Stoic Mothers and Detached Wives: The Mother Africa Trope**

While men have traditionally been the subject of history, we are now beginning to look at women's lives as presented through their creative writing, conscious that any genre offers only a partial view of the whole<sup>1</sup>.

As has been established in the preceding chapter, Black Consciousness literature challenged the existing standards and perceptions of literature and thus set out to identify and give rise to a new precedent. Part of the didactic function of Black Consciousness literature focused on the presentation of 'positive' Black characters in literature. Mafika Pascal Gwala (1988) expresses the phenomenon thus,

By Black writers ... the black is portrayed as a fully-fledged human being, with all the qualities that ought to make him a full citizen of his country, given all his capabilities of sacrifice and resistance. The black writer thus assumes a role in the social conflict; he cannot step out of it. His is not a matter of choice but a necessity<sup>2</sup>.

Gwala's choice of language in the description of both the 'black' and 'Black writers' as masculine is neither a coincidence, nor a case of the 'generic male' pronoun in use. It is representative of the characterisation of 'the black man' by Black writers of the period. The representation of Black women falls somewhat outside of the phrases 'fully-fledged' and a 'full citizen of his country'. As this study of the images of Black women in literature by both Black men and women will demonstrate, the complexity of characterisation is gender-specific in this body of literature. There are notable discrepancies in the types of roles that are attainable to Black male characters on the one hand, and those accessible to Black female characters, on the other.

Until recently the evaluation of much of African literature has remained predominantly along the lines of race. The 'non-sex specific voice' of the critics may be deciphered as male (Smith, 1989: 58). Analyses that are class and then gender sympathetic were generally added later to the critical analytical tools. There has been a growing need to explore the interrelated nature of

oppressions such as class, race and gender. As Pauline Terrelonge Stone notes, 'Black feminists have interrogated and explored ways in which the experience of race affects the experience of gender, specifically of womanhood, affects the expression of race' (Smith, 1989: 58).

When Valerie Smith writes about the critical theory inspired by the Black Arts Movement<sup>3</sup> as overtly masculinist, 'the discourse of this movement ... enshrines the possibility of Black male power' (1989:60), she could easily be referring to Black Consciousness writing. BC discourse articulated racial liberation as the liberation of the Black *male*. It centred on the Black male as the norm, thereby placing the Black female in the position of deviant.

The assignment of the present and the following chapters is to suggest ways into texts that could serve to uncover the associations and interconnections within the cultural production of race, class and gender in 'both the language and the ideological assumptions of black texts' (Smith, 1989: 62).

What follows is an examination of the kinds of portrayals that typify Black women characters in literature. Since there are several which feature consistently throughout the period covered, an in-depth analysis of each type found is necessary. It is also essential to note at this stage that the majority of short stories published in *Staffrider* during the first five years of its inception are from Black male writers. Where contributions from women writers surface they are sporadic and far-between, with Miriam Tlali, who contributes both short stories and authors the column 'Soweto Speaking', the only conspicuous exception. There exist only a scattering of articles contributed by women and these are repeatedly from the same women<sup>4</sup>.

Rebecca Matlou (1986) maintains that the Black woman writer in South Africa has a commitment similar to that of the Black male,

her sensitivity becomes much more sharpened than that of her [white woman] counterparts, her life is often providing themes ... remember that she is also a citizen affected by the oppressors' laws, she is a worker exploited by those who own the means of production, she is a mother in her home<sup>5</sup>.

This analysis is particularly illuminating in that it introduces three aspects which mediate her identity as a writer: her role in the domestic sphere determined by her biology (gender), her status as a Black person (race); and her life as a worker (class). What is further illuminating is the manner in which the three are indicative of the roles into which the portrayal of Black women in the stories tend to fall. Although Matlou's interpretation of Black women's lives acknowledges the overlap and the inter-influences that arise as a combination of the said categories, the bulk of the stories in *Staffrider* do not. In the *Staffrider* stories Black women characters (in the main) occupy each a single fossilised role. This is in sharp contrast with the reality discussed by Matlou. She stresses that Black women occupy several positions simultaneously, while the *Staffrider* stories create an artificial separation of these positions. This tendency is ironic given that BC literature claims to provide 'positive' and 'fully-fledged' representations of Black people. However, implicit in this move is the authority of the ideological foundation which informs the depiction of Black male and female subjects in the literature.

### **Standing by her man: wives and mothers outside the struggle**

The first category of Black women characters in *Staffrider* to receive attention is that which emphasises the ability and willingness of Black women characters to support their sons and husbands involved in political resistance to apartheid. This thesis does not problematise support for the characters' spouses and children *per se*. What is criticised here is the manner in which this support is framed at the expense of the female character. Instead it is the activity of the Black men, be they husbands or sons, which is seen as paramount in these stories. The women's experiences of politics and racism are *mediated* through their sons' or husbands' experiences. These women, although Black themselves and therefore subject to apartheid laws, are estranged from the arena of public politics. Since it is this public arena which interprets and gives meaning to racism, however, these female characters' experiences of racism are deemed insignificant. They have no direct access

to the struggle for liberation because they are women. Public politics derive meaning for them through the interpretations of the men they are attached to. This characterisation effectively distances these Black women characters from participating in the public challenging of racism, even as they are constantly affected by it. These women characters occupy an ambiguous position because their race positions them as subjects of apartheid, while their gender alienates them from the way in which apartheid is theorised and racial oppression articulated in the *Staffrider* stories. Effectively,

[a]s the 'Others' of society who can never really belong, strangers threaten the moral and social order. But they are simultaneously essential for its survival because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries. [Black] women, by not belonging, emphasize the significance of belonging<sup>6</sup>.

Often they experience the politics of the day only when the male character in question is adversely affected in one way or another. The Black woman character's position in relation to the Black male character creates and reinforces the image of the Black women as occupying a position outside the struggle<sup>7</sup>. This effect is achieved through the alienation of the Black female character from the political action, and her enforced physical separation from those places defined as the sites of the struggle. Consequently, the Black male experience of oppression is prioritised while hers is invalidated as inconsequential. Her awakening to the political mainstream is often a consequence of *his* life action, which she passively watches from the sidelines. She often is seen as holding him and the struggle back; and he as the proactive and progressive force instrumental in change.

As a corollary, therefore, when she experiences racism in settings that are outside of the usual male paradigm, these are not presented as harshly as those in which the male experience is dominant. An example of this, played out frequently in the stories, is that of racism in the work place. Where the man is in a formally acknowledged working sphere, the terms of racism between him and the employer are clearly spelt out. Because the bulk of employment opportunities for Black women in South Africa's urban areas is in the form of domestic work for white families, it is within

this paradigm that the figure of the working class Black woman features in the stories. The racial dynamics within *her* workplace are not explored in the same manner as the male workplace. Jacklyn Cock (1980) argues that the relationship between Black women and their white madams is 'in a very real sense ... a microcosm of the exploitation and inequality on which the entire social order is based' (231). However, the writers in *Staffrider* appear not to be of the same opinion. This is not so say that there is a paucity of stories which portray Black female characters as domestic servants to white families, for these indeed are plentiful. What is lacking is a problematisation of the manner in which these situations are presented, with the exception of the portrayal of the domestic worker by Nokugcina Sigwili. This story will receive notable attention in a later chapter.

Matlou (1986) suggests there is a need 'to correct the false distorted images of the [Black] woman as portrayed by [Black] men and some white [male and female] writers' (73). Although she suggests categories of her own, the categories which feature in this literature prominently fall into groupings which are quite distinct from those that she recognises<sup>8</sup>.

Desiree Lewis (1991) identifies the prominence which is awarded to the 'mother' because of its crucial function as it rewards the role of the traditional woman as feminine, obedient, nurturant and domesticated. This role together with that of the wife is presented as the image of the good Black woman. Lewis argues further that the strong mother figure often prioritises her boy-children. Her male children are deemed as more deserving of her attention and therefore more important than her female children. Because she is a patriarchal mother, Lewis labels her the 'phallic mother'<sup>9</sup>. Elsewhere, Lewis (1994) argues that the gendered language of Black Consciousness was not incidental but rather stood,

at the centre of Black Consciousness thinking [where there existed] emphasis on the emasculation of black men and their need to recover a positive masculine identity. It is this that explains the marginalisation of women in its rhetoric, and in ways in which women were appealed to mainly as psychological and material supports in male oriented struggles<sup>10</sup>.

Lewis adds that 'the centrality of mothering and supportiveness is related to the unusual dynamics of township resistance', a factor that is a result of the children's role being the central one in 1976 and adults generally being forced into a more auxiliary role (1994: 169). While I am in agreement with Lewis on the historical merit of the role of mother as merely supportive in 1976 and the aftermath, she identifies the 'adult' as being confined to an auxiliary role. That Lewis identifies the 'adult' as being in an auxiliary role implies that both mothers *and* fathers were included in the said support dichotomy. The reality of these stories, however, is such that there is a symptomatic absence of fathers<sup>11</sup> in the stories examined, except in roles other than those of offering support. It is precisely this prominence of the solitary mother (accompanied by the *absence and insignificance* of the father) figure in a period which would have allocated a supportive role to both parents, that leads to a questioning here of the ideology behind the importance of the mother figure. It is also due to the consequence of the role of the wife as similar to that of the mother which disqualifies the generation gap as justification for the roles that women assume in the literature at hand. This image pervades the literature so abundantly that it has several complex manifestations in this early stage of *Staffrider*.

The mother figure is presented as mother to her own children and defining herself in relation to them and their lives, existing only as an extension of the lives of her offspring, especially of the male persuasion. She is often the 'phallic mother' identified by Lewis. This is particularly the case when her son is a political activist. Since her role is defined simply in terms of her body's ability to bring forth activists for the struggle, she is seen as lacking any capacity to contribute to the liberation of her people as a human being *per se*. She is ever-present when needed, often shown to be silently suffering, dedicated to not only mothering her own children but also forced to mother the children of others outside her community. She is uncomplaining and does not engage in political activity in her own right. She is almost always portrayed as doing 'the right thing' by her children.

Where she is seen as deviating from this path, it is often attributed to factors outside of her control. The reader is rarely allowed into her psyche except to explore her thoughts in relation to her son. What is at play in the characterisation of the mother here is what Paula Nicolson sees as a pervasive tendency in most societies. Patriarchal illusion casts motherhood as 'a mythical, mysterious and powerful status' (1993: 201). Nicolson further argues that this is the manner in which a mother's love is represented both in literature and in non-fiction. According to her the myth of mother's love 'by implication, needs to be ever-available and offered without qualification, regardless of the mother's own needs and circumstances' (1993: 205). In light of Nicolson's analysis it appears as if the silence around the 'needs and circumstances' of women is not limited to Black Consciousness literature but is pervasive across many societies. She further maintains that 'the motherhood "mandate" is "serviced" by the popular and powerful belief system surrounding the notion of a maternal instinct' (1993: 208). As Ramphela (1996) often asserts, Black Consciousness ideology, which informed the literature under analysis here, did not operate in a vacuum, but was a product of the world in which it found expression. Its literature was thus open to influences from that same world. While writers who theorise gender and gender relations have pointed to the various ways in which patriarchal tendencies manifest themselves in different societies in different combinations with capitalism and racism, Nicolson's observations here stick. Because the Black female characters analysed in this chapter are positioned primarily as supportive, the 'romanticized' nature of their relationships with their sons and husbands is pursued by the writers and their narrators at the expense of a possible exploration of the Black female characters' 'needs and circumstances.' It is in part due to the very nature of their characterisation as ever-available mothers and wives that there is a silence in the stories about the female characters' roles where these are unlinked to (or in conflict with) their positions as 'strong' mothers. Nicolson is not alone in theorising the representations of mothers thus<sup>12</sup>. Indeed many theorists of gender have taken on the task of unmasking the



implications of the 'illusion' of the ever-present, supportive mother (hooks, 1982; Collins, 1990; Lewis, 1991; Edholm, 1982; Moore, 1988, Thurer, 1994).

Shari L. Thurer maintains that the construction and ideology of the 'good mother' is culturally derived and that 'even as the mother is all powerful, she ceases to exist. She exists bodily of course, but her needs as a [character] become null and void' (1994: xvii). The myth of the powerful mother character is then deceptive since there is a pervasive literary tradition in which characters cast as mothers are without voice. Instead they exist only in relation to their children/partners. This means that their 'maternity is the terrain of [their] authority' (Warner, 1994: 7). However, this 'authority' does not come with any real power, even as it appears to.

When she is not mothering her own children she is the absent longed-for figure who is forced to live in town looking after and raising white children. Here, too, her ability to mother and nurture is taken for granted. Her silence in her township home is surpassed perhaps only by her silence in the white household. Just as she is passive in politics, she stays in the background in the white family household. She emerges only when it is deemed appropriate by her employers. Inactive, when her perspective is shown, it is simply to show how ill-treated she is. Her suffering is portrayed as her strength, glorified as is her apparent inability to speak for herself: her silent suffering is interpreted as a virtue<sup>13</sup>.

Florence Stratton (1994) argues that the image of the mother that is so pervasive in African literature,

operates to refute the colonial mode of representation of Africa, replacing the image of Africa as a savage and treacherous by a positive one: Africa as warm and sensuous, fruitful and nurturing<sup>14</sup>.

That the image of the silent Black mother is evoked repeatedly when there is reference to the continent is further illuminating: it reinforces the image of women as tied to the earth. Over the

period studied there are no fewer than 83 poems by men and women who contributed to *Staffrider* which fits into the category where the Black female body becomes fused with the 'body' of the African continent<sup>15</sup>. It also operates against the full actualisation of the Black woman character because it immortalises and objectifies her as a passive recipient of painful emotions. Denied a presence as a character because of being reduced to the single level of symbolism, her life is forced to represent the state of the country. Silenced by the writers and narrators, her character is most obliging to the theorising of her body and her life as the symbol of the demise of the country. This representation excludes the Black woman character from a theorising of a politics of liberation since she is there merely to serve to fulfil and justify the male vision of freedom. That the discourse of the literature itself is centred around race as sign 'discourage[s] any literary exploration of gender and other differences that might complicate a unitary experience of Black experience' (Dubey, 1994: 1). This has meant therefore that, ironically, instead of positive images of Black women, *Staffrider* literature presents the reader with stereotypical portrayal of Black women characters. The gender identity of Black female characters complicates their position as racial subjects even as their racial identity necessitates their connection to Black male characters. The Black Consciousness influence on the literature has been restrictive in its ideological inscription of Black womanhood. It is now necessary to look at the stories in some detail.

Aubrey Ngcobo's 'The Day A Leader Died'<sup>16</sup> takes place through the consciousness of MaShezi, the mother of Ndabezinhle, a political activist who has died. Her son had been very active in the All Azanian Students' Movement. She had allowed meetings to take place in her house because, '[s]he had been happy to see all those intellectuals in her house. There were teachers, doctors, lawyers and other educated men' (57). MaShezi is in awe of all the people in her house who hold meetings with her son and others like him. The narrative continues,

[s]he had been curious about what was being discussed there but had not dared ask. She had been afraid of the great people and afraid of whatever was being discussed

out there (57).

MaShezi sees the political meetings that take place in her own home space as being too complex for her. She is consequently intimidated by the presence of the great minds who converse and plan the course of political action in her home. She asks no questions as a result of her alienation and intimidation. MaShezi is excluded from the meetings on two counts: as a woman of her age, and because she identifies the role players as 'educated men'. Consequently, there is no space for her as a woman standing outside the middle-class circle of educated Black male professionals.

In spite of her status as observer, when all the decisions are made, she feels bound by them. Her reasons are perhaps not quite the ones for which her son and company would have her cooperate. For instance, when the AASM organises a work boycott<sup>17</sup> and thus go around to all the train stations 'order[ing] everybody to go back home[,] [f]ew [do]. Amongst them she. How could she go to work after hearing her son speaking such anti-Government words in front of the police' (57). Her reasons are a combination of fear and concern for her son, not political conviction. She goes on the boycott not in support of the principle but because of her son's words. Thus although she makes a political decision, it has more to do with her son's behaviour in front of the police than with the content of the 'anti-Government words' which come out of her son's mouth.

The boycott is followed by an incident where the local Technical College is burnt down and her son no longer sleeps at home. When Mr Duma, a lawyer, comes to reassure her of her son's safety, she thinks to herself, '[i]t was easy for him not to worry: after all, it wasn't his own son who was in all this trouble' (57). She is subsequently angered by the police and South African Defence Force (SADF) brutality. When the media justifies the reaction of the police and army, MaShezi imagines alternative reactions to the stone throwing students. To her, the soldiers had options which ranged from leaving the townships alone to using rubber bullets in place of live ammunition<sup>18</sup>.

She worries about the status of her son *vis-a-vis* the State and wonders why nobody cares about *her* well-being in her period of suffering as a result of her son's predicament. The regular police raids on her house distress and frustrate her further. She also begins to feel as if her son is being held responsible for everything that has happened, forcing her ironically to defend his politics. It is in his defence that she labels the destruction which reverberates as part of a smear campaign since all that the AASM wanted was 'FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION.' Interestingly she defends the politics she felt alienated from because of what has happened to her son.

She is further disturbed that no one sees it fit to talk to her at her son's funeral. Instead, people give money generously during the collection shouting 'Amandla' because, '[n]obody wanted it said unto him that he had not cared when the leader had died. Some of them had never seen him. But they knew it was the correct thing to do' (57). She feels alone because the show of solidarity presented by the young people is unfamiliar to her world. She is not an activist like them and an outsider at her son's funeral. It is to her impersonal that support is monetary and in the form of sloganeering. Nobody talks to her, and she once again feels alienated by the politics of her son and his contemporaries. This is emphasised when the narrator relates, 'The students were in charge of everything. They were preparing for his burial. The students allowed no one to cry, but MaShezi had found it difficult to obey their rule' (57).

Her experience is repeatedly presented as separate and different from the expectations of the students. She tries to go by the rules set up by the students while her son is alive as well as at his funeral. The students make decisions, as did her son and the educated men earlier. She simply obeys or attempts to. Her son's politics are not hers. There is no glimpse into what her own politics are since politics are filtered through her son's activism and death.

When she sees Ndabezinhle's girlfriend she is reminded of the fact that he had been born illegitimate and that her son could also have fathered a child. She also wonders sadly how many

children will be born fatherless, having been conceived at the time. The young women at the funeral symbolise for MaShezi only sexuality and the possibility of motherhood, despite the political significance of their presence. Thus she too concedes to the order which places the Black women (character) outside of the struggle even when they so consciously insert themselves into public politics. In the death of Black men she sees only the possibility of fatherless children (that is, children born to unmarried couples) when watching the young women activists. The young women characters themselves are not political to her in the same way that her son and male contemporaries are. All she can sense from and for them is the kind of suffering and loneliness that she had to endure as a result of being a single parent.

She despises the educated men she had earlier admired because they can leave the country, send their children to private schools in Britain where the children are 'never bothered by an inferior school system there ... [and] ... [have] never been shot for singing and walking up and down streets there' (58). Afterwards, these educated men still receive credit for masterminding the programme from the media. As a parent she resents the opportunities that other people's children have access to.

Because she is a 'good' mother, however, the story ends on a note that glorifies her son's contribution, despite its atmosphere of sadness. She questions the official story of his having hanged himself in police detention, noting that he looked like he 'had been run over by a truck, after he had been worked over by the Nazis' (58).

While MaShezi appears to be analytical and critical, she has no place in the politics of the day. This is made quite clear by the *modus operandi* of the programme. That she is aware of her position as a Black woman in apartheid South Africa is highlighted when she questions the killings that the State precipitates, both in the hands of the police as well as in the hands of the comrades. She also sees her son's death in the context of other political deaths that preceded his. There is a

hint of hope as she sees the motivation for their lives and perhaps it is within this context that her son's name illuminates her experience<sup>19</sup>. She then finds herself questioning the meaning and significance of the labels (of leader and hero) she has attached to him. By the time the story ends, she is reconciled to the elusive nature of these same labels.

Her position outside political theorising and planning equips her with the ability to question the practices of the movement from the outside. However, that she has any relationship and awareness of the political issues at all is intricately tied to the role of her son in the activities of the AASM and her relationship as mother to him. While she may be able to think a certain way which can be labelled political, her behaviour is seen to mask the presence of this political consciousness. Activism requires action based on political convictions not mere thought. When she does act, it is in accordance with the rules set out in Ndabezinhle's activism.

The fate of the mother in Mtutuzeli Matshoba's 'My Friend, the Outcast'<sup>20</sup> is similar. Although the narrative centres around the 'friend' in the title, of special prominence in this story is the image of the suffering, wronged mother. She is thrown out of her house, supposedly for being behind with her rent payment, then taken from her home in the middle of the night and humiliated by the 'blackjacks' who rudely coax, 'C'mon, c'mon, magogo, phangisa (hurry up). Umlungu will not wait for you. We are working here' (12). Thus in her old age, she is reduced to apologetically smiling and attempting to hurry up. The superintendent addresses her in Afrikaans, which she does not understand. Upon asking a clerk for translation, she receives further ridicule and humiliation for not speaking the language. Immediately thereafter she is reprimanded for not paying the rent. The superintendent refuses to allow her to produce her receipts as proof because he maintains, 'So you think you're smart about the receipts, huh? Didn't your children steal them when they burnt down the offices' (12). What follows is her eviction from her house because somebody has bribed the official to illegally acquire a house.

Her stoicism and courage are shown when she says, 'Atleast I'm entitled to a last cup of tea in what has been my home for the great part of my life' (13). This statement causes the narrator to remark on her exceptional composure. His laudatory statement serves to illustrate what is seen as desirable in the figure of the mother, her endless capacity to endure suffering. Further, '[s]he gave me the impression that she looked forward to the future as if it were one more challenge in addition to the many which had comprised her life' (13).

Although there are clear signs of her suffering, the narrator interprets her as being brave and ready for battle. The narrative appears to be mocking, albeit unintentionally, the woman's suffering. That her affliction cannot be seen for what it is, is central to the stereotypical figure she cuts. As we have seen, it is important for the success of this trope that the mother figure be able to withstand almost everything without falling apart like any other human character/being would given similar circumstances. She must have enough strength to endure whatever the apartheid State can dole out to her.

She is, however, unable to have even her last cup of tea since the eviction crew is upon them as soon as her words leave her mouth. As the crew members enter, Mrs. Nyembezi is portrayed as angelic, with the narrator absolving her from the ability to feel hatred for another human being. She can nobly direct all her feelings of enmity towards the act, rather than the people involved in it (13). This is a woman given a limited range of emotions. Part of her courage stems from her ability to forgive and renounce anger in the face of trials and tribulations. When she suffers, she does so in a manner unlike Vusi, her son, about whom we are told,

[h]is head was not held as high as [the narrator] had known him to hold it. He dragged his feet when he walked and he took along time to return [the narrator's] greeting (13).

Thus while the audience is permitted access to a dehumanised Black man, stripped of his pride, the mother figure does not have access to the same kind of feeling but exists simply to suffer and bear it

oppression, and as if there is an automatic link between a woman and a bitch. Also striking within his metaphor is the feeling engendered by the possibility of a suffering ('tied-down') female dog. It is not pity or a desire to set it free which he feels. Instead, both the women characters' social bondage and the bitch's confinement make him nauseous, a particularly ironic sentiment in the light of his immediate 'plan'. He and his compatriot are prepared to fight (and possibly die) to ensure their freedom. Their oppression inspires them to resistance, yet the sight of others in shackles nauseates Mojalefa. His responses to oppressive situations therefore are determined by the identity of the subjugated party. He is able to comfortably inhabit this contradiction even as he spells it out for S'bongile to hear. She does not challenge it, choosing rather to ratify it by asking his permission to apply for a pass.

S'bongile fears that she will never see her husband again, aware that he is drifting further away from her into his other world, the one she is not allowed entry into. The reader is thus confronted with the image of the woman character harbouring a selfish love for a man who loves his family but has greater affairs to pursue. As if sensing her alienation from his other world that has no place for her, he turns around and consoles,

[i]n any case [...] it will be up to *you*, the ones who remain behind, the women and the mothers, to motivate those who are still dragging their feet; you'll remain only to show them why they must follow in our footsteps. That the future and dignity of blacks as a nation and as human beings is worth fighting for (30).

Thus is her role in the liberation of Black people inscribed. Although she is to know and appreciate that freedom is worth fighting for, she may only teach and coax others to do so and not act upon this knowledge herself. Mojalefa, therefore, presupposes that fighting for one's country is a man's station, thereby excluding all women from participating in the armed struggle, choosing instead to limit their role to that of mother and teacher of men ('you'll remain *only* to show them'). Seeing himself as a hero, he assumes that people will follow in his footsteps while those who choose a different route are described as 'dragging their feet.' By doing this he frames himself as a pioneer in



adopting armed combat as a means to win South Africa for its Black population.

S'bongile responds to this by pointing out that Mojalefa's father differs with his son, in the identical manner to herself. Their position is that it would be better to educate people, thereby gaining more support and numbers, which they feel can only make things better for the liberation armies.

Before any resolution can take place in their conversation, Gugu, their two month old baby, coughs and needs suckling. We discover that S'bongile was to start studying at Turfloop before she fell pregnant. Mojalefa then feels guilty thinking about S'bongile's 'poor widowed mother; how she had saved and toiled so that [S'bongile] could be able to start at university' (31). The mother is the recipient of pity both for her marital status (a woman without a man) as well as for the hard work she has done in vain. The sexual act (during which Gugu was conceived) between the two lovers is described thus:

Mind you, I knew something like [pregnancy] would happen, yet I went right ahead and talked you into yielding to me. I was drawn to you by a force *so* great, I just could not resist it (31).

Mojalefa then proceeds to relate to S'bongile the trouble he had explaining to his father why he did not want to marry her, because of his political commitment; and why he was not worried about her because he knew that some other man would be more than willing to marry her even though she had a child by him because, '[she] possess[es] those rare attributes that any man would want to feel around him and be enkindled by' (31). He is nonetheless disappointed in himself because he had failed to 'develop and show true respect for our [sic] African womanhood' which is a clause in his organisation's disciplinary code (31).

While Mojalefa agrees to accept responsibility for making her pregnant, the manner in which he chooses to do so is suspect. He takes full responsibility, leaving her as the lifeless, yielding 'other' in the act. He is the only one who was aware of what was happening and he was unable to

control himself. She is simply convinced into 'yielding' to him.

If he does not return, S'bongile will be 'grabbed' by some man that she will stimulate 'before long' (31). She, therefore, is completely without choice as far as he is concerned, because the possibility of her taking care of herself is not explored at all. It falls outside of his consciousness of possibilities for her. Since he chooses to see her as passive in relation to him, he is unable to visualise any image of her without an active male by her side. He opts to talk about her in terms of his code and 'African womanhood'.

When S'bongile speaks again, it is evident that she appreciates what she has just heard. She speaks of her gratitude that Mojalefa was born to his father, because otherwise he would not have turned out the same. 'Not all women are so fortunate. How many beautiful, innocent girls have been deserted by their lovers and are roaming the streets with illegitimate babies on their backs, children they cannot support?' (31), she questions. The logic of her response is somewhat muddled. She appreciates the father's intervention and insistence that the two of them get married because otherwise she too would be 'roaming the streets with [an] illegitimate bab[y]' deserted by her lover. She too therefore does not envisage the possibility of a single mother supporting her child without a man.

The two characters are at this stage true to their names. S'bongile here presents herself as the grateful woman timeously saved by the father-in-law from a fate that is described as both pitiful and terrifying. That she will be in precisely this position as soon as he leaves, without a job because he will not allow her to apply for a pass, is not apparent to her. The reason for her gratitude is therefore all the more perplexing. He too is perfectly suited to his name. He believes truly that his is the only way and that there is a guaranteed reward at the end of the plan<sup>24</sup>. The inheritance that he chooses for himself is different from that which his father has maintained for him: the house, the material gains and the security that these promise to bring with them. He chooses instead the

bequest of the country and his people desiring liberation.

In the final stages of their conversation, he tells her the story of his political awakening. The effect that this has on her is the illustration that she needed to understand his position. His life enlightens and interprets for her (a *fellow* Black South African) the meaning and effect of racism on Black people. The simplicity of this approach is not problematised, and is unstartling only due to the frequency of the appearance of this motif in the literature of the time: the Black man is constantly construed as the only one who can make sense of the systematic racial oppression faced by Black people under apartheid.

In Dikobe Martins' 'Jazz & Rugby, Tough Games Brother ...'<sup>25</sup>, there are three kinds of female characters described in this story: the central character's mother pacified by Christianity; his aunt who is a shebeen queen; and the '[f]ive women dressed in sky-blue attire' who are the minister's companions.

The central character, Poshoka, is a guerrilla fighter. We are introduced to his thoughts before his last mission, where he looks back at his life almost as if aware of its impending end. He thinks about his mother with a mixture of awe and sadness. He laments the fact that he did not get to know her as well as he would have liked to. He hardly saw her because she was always at work -- leaving home early and coming back late. She had managed to make life in their one-bedroomed house seem better than bearable. He marvels at her ability to make light of the difficulty of their material conditions. She had often joked to Mogotsi, Poshoka's brother, 'Son, but we do have a wardrobe. Even Oppenheimer hasn't got a moving wardrobe like ours' (35). Poshoka admits that although they had all laughed when his mother said this about 'their clothing hanging from a nail in the door', it was not an amusing situation at all.

He now wonders how she had managed to answer their questions so 'pleasantly.' Because she is a 'good Christian', she had 'slaved hard for them doing washing for whites, and she prayed

hard to the good Lord. Unlike her sister who served ice-cold beers to her customers whilst humming a church hymn or Nkosi Sikelele under her breath' (35). Poshoka thinks about his mother's life in contrast to the life his aunt has chosen for herself. In his interior monologue the rewards of being a 'good Christian' are ironic in that they shape Poshoka's mother into subservience, both mentally and financially; while the 'sinner' or 'bad Christian' has at least room to manoeuvre in her financial speciality. However, Poshoka does not hold up his aunt's lifestyle as the preferable option to his mother's position. Indeed the drunk in the train is not taken seriously. He clumsily knocks over the contents of the food baskets next to the minister and the women accompanying him. The drunk then proceeds to be both a nuisance and a source of amusement for the other passengers in the train. The role of alcohol is more ambiguous than the role of Christianity in Poshoka's mind. While the drunk and his aunt are not taken too seriously they do appear to have more freedom to move than the Christians.

Martins' narrator is critical of the role of Christianity in much the same way that Biko dismisses its role and relevance to the lives of young Black South Africans<sup>26</sup>. This is emphasised further when Poshoka speaks of the '*moruti*' as a 'spiritual terrorist'. It is clear that for Poshoka, as for the older (unnamed) man in the train, Christianity does not offer any solution for the reality of life for Black South Africans under apartheid. A similar sentiment is expressed in R. Thutloe's 'I've Lost My Music'<sup>27</sup> where the speaker announces:

Spell it out  
 Tell them the truth  
 The bitterness of it  
 It is you  
 My Bible, my good book  
 Man's reference book  
 Yet it cannot be used like  
 other books in the library  
 Diverting of man's positive thinking  
 You taught me to sing  
 The Gospel

Kneel for Uncle Tomism  
and I sang the Lord's Prayer  
Our Father ... Amen.

Here the Bible and the practice of Christianity sap the energy of the speaker forcing him/her to succumb to reactionary behaviour (l. 12). If the Bible promotes 'Uncle Tomism' it cannot reside comfortably alongside progressive thought and action. By the end of the poem (l. 24), the speaker has discovered that the Bible and Christian practice not only force him/her to engage in reactionary behaviour, they are responsible for the emptiness and the ability of the speaker to lose 'My original African tune' (l. 23).

It is interesting to note that while there are many options available to the male characters in the train<sup>28</sup>, the female characters can only be Christians, shebeen queens or marginal women seen as suffering<sup>29</sup>. The minister is said to be symbolic of many other men of the cloth who 'always travel with many women and the male membership is almost nil' (14). Biko was quoted in the previous chapter as arguing that many can see through the doctrine of Christianity and consequently leave the churches in 'droves'. Martins' narrator appears to be alluding to a similar phenomenon here. However, here it appears everybody but the women abandon the church if the 'male membership' is 'almost nil'. Biko had argued that it is the youth which found no use in the church anymore.

A reader on the train with Poshoka, informed of the news of another youth killing by police in Soweto featured on the *Daily Mail*, remarks,

What do they want from us? They took our soil, and today our women wash and feed them, and I like a mole, toil and bleed for the gold ring with the flawless diamond madam wears. [...]

Who heard me cry from the deep dark womb of the earth for loved ones who nourished the barren reserve soil with the fruits of their wombs, and dreamed of fruits of the soil, and I too [...] dig the hole when the master dies of overeating ... in this world, brother, a man can cry [...] (36)

The struggle is seen again as existing between Black men and white men. Black women are alluded to in the possessive case as belonging to Black men, while white women are presented as merely

decorated (by the 'gold ring with the flawless diamond') and put on a pedestal, without any of their actions being seen as oppressive. Both Black and white women therefore are excluded from receiving or benefiting from racism and the power (and lack thereof) which emanates from this domination. That men cry is presented as unnatural and surprising; a result brought about by this unhealthy state of affairs. The above quotation conflates the wombs of Black women with the 'womb' of the earth/continent. Black women, called 'our women' by the reader, suffer because they 'wash and feed' white South Africans, like Poshoka's mother. Her life is therefore not only used here because of Poshoka's thoughts. It is used as a life symbolic of a large part of the reality for Black women in apartheid South Africa. Furthermore although both the Black women and the earth have wombs, the similarities end there. The Black women talked about 'nourished [...] with the fruits of their wombs,' while the 'reserve soil' is 'barren' (36). Here the earth in both the bantustans (reserves) and in the mines (city) are conflated as mother Africa. They have wombs, similar to those of Black women, the reader argues but the process of giving birth is not presented as positive. The earth is unable to give birth constantly and when it does it is often 'the violence of malnutrition, the hunger and poverty we reap from the land of our fathers' (14). The Black women offer their children to the earth to attain 'callous hands' like the reader from working in the 'womb' of the earth. Both these 'mothers' are suffering, one unable to give birth and the other destined to lose her children or offer them up to suffering.

Shortly after this monologue, Poshoka disembarks from the train on his mission to plant a TNT bomb at Ellis Park during a rugby match. It explodes, killing him (perhaps according to plan in view of his earlier thoughts) and the story ends:

On the outskirts of Johannesburg city, somewhere in Alexandra township in a small dimly candle-lit room, a mother adrift in pain shakes under the bloodstorm of mourning. It is not the first time she has tasted the salt of these tears [...](36)

It is Poshoka's mother who is described here. The first time she felt this sorrow was when Mogotsi,

her other son, had died a political death. More recently, she has cried because of the consequences of Poshoka's political activism when he was alive. She suffers now because of the fate of her son, 'adrift' signalling her overwhelming sea of pain. Poshoka's mother, so exalted earlier, is under a wealth of uncontrollable pain.

We can see that this woman is symbolic of other mothers whose sons were killed in the struggle. There appears to be a scarcity of fathers mourning lost children throughout the five years of stories examined. Perhaps the father too is off fighting somewhere, since by virtue of his Black manhood he has more access to politics than any Black woman.

The mothers are always mourning their *sons'* deaths, disappearances and imprisonments or supporting their activist *male* children. This theme receives much exploration in the poetry published in *Staffrider* as well. In Boitumelo's 'Here I Stand'<sup>30</sup>, the Black woman laments the loss of her offspring. The poem begins 'Here I Stand/With no child in sight/Did I conceive to throw away?' (l. 1-3). The woman's pain here is directly linked only to her inability to be with her children. Separation from them is the chief cause of her pain. She lists several ways in which she has lost them and these are not limited to activism, but this time include migration to the cities, death at the mines and deliberately inflicted pain and death. In a similar vein Manoko Nchwe's speaker in 'My Tears'<sup>31</sup> begins 'My life is at stake' (l.1) while the remainder of the poem reveals that the source of pain and threat to her 'life' stems from the fate of her child. The poem ends, 'I thought I was delivering a baby/But it was a victim of oppression' (l7-8). Winnie Morolo's 'Courage, African Woman'<sup>32</sup> expands on the same theme explored by Boitumelo and Nchwe. While the mother crying out in Morolo's poem suffers too because of her children, she finds hope in the possibility that her children may be heroes one day. This poem also elucidates the role of the Black woman in the struggle for liberation as echoed repeatedly throughout the pages of *Staffrider* magazine. She is there only to give birth and to be 'responsible for her family' (l. 11). All three of these poems

penned by Black women poets reinforce the theme of the Black women's alienation from the struggle for liberation. While their children are allowed many choices and sources of pain, the mothers themselves are not. Their biological ability to reproduce is their point of entry into the politics of the day. They have a role which simply *reacts* to the paths the sons have chosen for themselves. This role is defined by suffering. The daughters are scarcely ever political, perhaps because they too are getting ready to become mothers. This literature therefore repeatedly reinforces the idea that the only place available to a Black woman in the struggle against oppression is in her capacity as a mother and/or supporter. This denies the existence of female guerrilla fighters, ignoring their role entirely<sup>33</sup>. Political activism is an area demarcated almost exclusively as Black men's domain in these stories<sup>34</sup>, erasing the contribution that Black women have made in the political arena in Southern Africa.

The Black women in Matshoba's 'To Kill A Man's Pride'<sup>35</sup> are portrayed as useful to restore the pride that has been stripped from the Black male narrator by the white male doctor. He needs a medical examination to get a permit to work in Johannesburg. The last part of the medical examination was the most disgraceful (stripping without any privacy in the presence of both sexes);

My pride had been hurt enough by exposing myself to him, with the man behind me preparing to do so and the one in front of me having done the same; a row of men of different ages parading themselves before a bored owl [...] (6)

That the Black men are humiliated by the process of parading naked in front of other people is quite established here. The doctor is seen only in his capacity to observe hence the piercing gaze that emanates from his eyes. It is his gaze, emphasised by the narrator, more than anything else which is felt to be dehumanising. Further, the narrator is affected after

[t]he medical examination was over and the women in the benches on the outside pretended they did not know. The young white ladies clicking their heels up and down the passage showed you that they knew (6).



From the above quotation it is clear that the Black women's choice to feign ignorance is therapeutic to the narrator's ego. By casting their eyes downwards the women are not party to the dehumanising stares described above. Although he knows that they saw him naked, their choice to look down and not directly at him emphasises their solidarity with him. They too are embarrassed. The behaviour of the white 'ladies', in contrast, adds salt to the wound made by the white man.

Black women and white 'ladies' in the story, however, are different in more ways than one. It is not only their behaviour in relation to the Black man's embarrassment which sets them apart. Nor do their differences end with a clear choice to align themselves with the men of their respective races. These differences can also be seen in the manner in which these characters are put forward and their images relayed. The white women are 'ladies' who wear 'heels' while walking up and down the passage. By contrast, the Black women are labelled 'women' and sit on benches waiting and showing sympathy and support to the Black man. The distinction between 'ladies' and 'women' is one that is marked by financial standing and power and therefore has class resonances. Only the white women can be called ladies, because they have the money and the power to carry themselves like 'ladies.' They have the resources to take care of their appearances. Being a lady also means that they are allowed freedom to move about without restriction. On the contrary, poor Black women are forced to sit on the benches, patiently waiting for employment and their turn to be humiliated in ways unclear to them. Ladies can move up and down and never have to wait; as is demonstrated by sexist clichés such as 'ladies first' which pose the position of lady and waiting as mutually exclusive.

The presentation of the humiliation of the Black male narrator also serves to reinforce the idea that racism is an issue between Black men and white men. After all, both the 'women' and the 'ladies' choose sides and thereby remain loyal to the men of their respective races. The roles of women of each race are here clearly delineated. It is the white male doctor who is primarily

responsible for the Black male narrator's humiliation. The white women are in collusion with the racist treatment of the Black man by the white male. Similarly, the Black women are supposed to be unequivocally supportive of the narrating Black man and his colleagues.

Much attention is paid to the differences between 'women' and 'ladies.' In this way the distance between the races (of the two groups of women) is emphasised, even as the narrator tries to bring the two groups together as women. Initially he is, after all, embarrassed by the possibility of men *and* women seeing him naked. In the story the Black men's relationship with white men is clearly mapped, as is the Black men-white women, and the Black man-Black woman one. Similarly the white male-white female link is quite clear, as is the connection between white female-Black female one. However, with all the dynamics in existence in the story, there is an absent link or interactive situation between Black females and white males, as if these two groups never meet and interact. It is unclear, for example, whether the Black women are waiting to be humiliated in a similar manner to the Black male narrator or not. They are important only in so far as they can reassure the narrator and soothe his damaged pride.

Papa Siluma's 'It's Necessary'<sup>36</sup> is a third person narration of a woman's consciousness. Thembi has just received news of her husband, Maqhawe's, death. The narrative takes shape as she mourns that they only had a year of marriage. This was before he had left the country to join the armed struggle.

The manner in which the story is told is quite interesting in several ways. Her thoughts are mediated through a third person narrator; we never hear or read her words or thoughts as they were spoken. Whenever she thinks back to Maqhawe's words, however, it is repeatedly in direct speech. This ensures that the reader can hear him quite clearly while we can only know her through the narrating voice which has access to her consciousness. Secondly, she experiences the struggle through him. It appears as if she is unable to make decisions about political commitment. We are

told that he thought of her as a 'political minded person' (10). Similarly, the narrator informs us that,

[t]he only thing that she had valued in life had been taken from her. It was only now that she understood fully the meaning of sacrifice -- losing the very things one valued most, the ones that one did not wish to lose for anything (11).

Earlier on we had been told,

But if Maqhawe did not deserve to die, *whose husband, son or daughter* did? If everyone's loved ones did not participate then the struggle would come to a halt, and clearly that meant giving a free hand to the oppressor. This was the last thing she wished to see happening. The situation prevailing in her country, remained unacceptable to her. It was an out-and-out evil (11) [Emphasis added].

Although there appears to be space for sons and daughters equally to die, the chances for husbands and wives are asymmetrical. This would seem a trite comment were it not so in keeping with the rest of the stories of the time discussed earlier in this section. Because the wife in this instance is 'political *minded*' while all the other people mentioned die because of their convictions, there is an assumption that wives will sit and *think* about the implications of what their loved ones *do*.

The names of the two characters are also quite striking. Maqhawe's name, meaning 'heroes'<sup>37</sup>, is well suited to the man who has died a hero's death, fighting for his country's liberation. Thembi, on the other hand, is denied meaning because only a shortened version of her name is provided. The full version is denied to the reader as is the fuller picture of her person. 'Thembi', on its own, does not mean anything since it could be short for any one of a range of names<sup>38</sup>. She also does not have much hope for the future for we are told,

For sometime to come her life would be a river full of whirlpools of destructive self-pity. It would be a painful longing for Maqhawe and the happy times they had together. She as a swimmer would constantly have to strive to steer clear of those whirlpools if she were not to be sucked under and submerged (11).

The woman in Funda Ntuli's 'In The Twilight Embrace'<sup>39</sup> is cast in a similar vein. She is worried about her husband, arrested for reading banned books and distributing banned material, urging

people to stay away from work. These were discovered by police raiding their house. The entire narration focuses on her thought process, in which her husband features quite prominently. She is sexually tempted by her husband's best friend, Nkululeko<sup>40</sup>, but she rejects him. His name is ironic in that it is not quite clear what he is to free her from. She can resist him because she realises the need to be strong for her husband and their son.

This unnamed woman is again representative of the 'good' wife who pines away while the husband is in jail or suffering some other consequence of political action. She, on the other hand, can only sit at home and think, experiencing the trauma of politics through his suffering. She has no entry into the struggle for herself, does not even evaluate this as an option. Her value is as a thinker and reader of her husband's books, but she has no agency outside of this realm. We only know her in so far as she is a wife and mother and not further than that. She is lauded for her ability to suffer endlessly without wavering in her support of her man. Collins (1991) argues that,

By claiming that black women are richly endowed with the devotion, self-sacrifice and unconditional love -- the attributes associated with archetypal motherhood -- black men inadvertently foster a different controlling image for black women, that of the 'superstrong Black mother' (116).

The character of the Black mother, in these stories, is limited and denied full actualisation. Where these female characters are allowed to occupy more than one position, the only other option is that of wife. As mothers and wives of activists, therefore, their place is simply to support and encourage. There is no space for them to participate fully in the development of politics in the manner that their sons and husbands do. Instead they remain loyally poised as one-dimensional support systems.

### **Happily mothering Black and white children**

Occasionally female characters are required to mother more than Black activists. Instead they are called upon to leave their children unattended as they raise white children. Positioned thus, they

mother both Black and white children; which leads to problems slightly different from those examined thus far.

Jayapraga Reddy's 'The Slumbering Spirit'<sup>41</sup> has a third person narrator and focuses on the relationship between Black and white characters. Terry, a little Black boy sent on errands by his mother, is sent on further errands by the old white woman who lives in his street. She tells him that he is nice and unlike other 'coloured' boys around. He is too young to take offence, but the narrator tells repeatedly of his discomfort around Mrs Anderson at the beginning<sup>42</sup>. He also does not want anybody to know about his relationship with her, answering 'bashfully' when his mother asks him about where he came upon the sweets. It is not only the disapproval of his friends that Terry tries to avoid by keeping his relationship with Miss Anderson a secret. His siblings tease him when they find out about it and his mother warns him against 'getting mixed up with the whites' (21).

His relationship with her continues to be troubled by discomfort although Miss Anderson is completely oblivious to this. Later the narrator announces that Terry 'lost his initial awkwardness and taciturnity. He found he could talk to her; indeed that he enjoyed telling her things' (21). He finds a listening ear in her whereas at home his mother, busy with the household chores and taking care of ten children, cannot spare the time as easily and readily as lonely Miss Anderson can. When Pam, Terry's sister, marries and needs a new home, the old white woman, Miss Anderson, lets the new couple have two of her rooms in her house. A few years later, Miss Anderson falls sick. Because Pam lives with her she is thrust into a position where she has to take care of her. Miss Anderson is helpless and relies on Pam for everything -- even though she has a sister in Canada who waits for her to die before flying to South Africa. The sister eventually arrives to take care of the estate and gives Terry the old dog that belonged to Miss Anderson. Even Terry sees through this supposed gesture of goodwill and gratitude because,

Terry stared at her, speechless. Every boy loves a dog. But an old dog that was too tired to even wag its tail and who moved so stiffly (22)?

The only manner in which the two Black characters are of any use to the white woman is in positions of servitude. Terry is at her disposal and she may send him wherever she wants. While Miss Anderson is clearly not obliged to offer Pam and her husband a place to stay, this arrangement is not without advantages for her. Pam is able to run errands for Miss Anderson in place of Terry and later Pam is *forced* to taking care of the old woman. Similarly, the sister only sees Terry as worthy of the old dog. She has no use for it herself, and can therefore rid herself of the responsibility by giving it to the boy. Terry, Pam and their family are not pleased with the manner in which Miss Anderson handles matters. Pam interprets this as ungrateful behaviour for she 'indignantly' says, 'To think she did not even leave us a pot plant!'(22) Pam and Terry are needed by the Andersons only in so far as they can be of service to them. The argument here appears to be that relationships between white people and Black people in apartheid South Africa are inherently characterised by inequality and obligation. Terry and Pam's mother says as much at the end of the story when her children have ignored her earlier warning and are now obviously disillusioned by the outcome of the situation, 'I told you, didn't I? Never trust a white. They worry about their own skins, not the next man. Let this be a warning to you' (*idem*). However, as the story ends, it is Terry's thoughts which contradict Pam<sup>43</sup> and her mother's conclusions about Miss Anderson and her sister. He has learnt something from her which 'he could carry with him for a lifetime' (*idem*). For Terry and Pam the lessons to be drawn from interactions with Miss Anderson and her sister differ markedly. Terry learns something positive about interactions across race because he found something in Miss Anderson that he had found nowhere else even as their relationship was not without contradictions. For Pam, however, having taken care of Miss Anderson to her dying day, there should be some reward. There is none. Hence the lesson she walks away with is more similar to the opinions voiced by her mother which she does not question or disagree with than the manner

in which Terry interprets the situation.

Morongwanyane's 'Lone Black Woman'<sup>44</sup>, MaChauke, has worked for the same family as a domestic worker for a long time. She takes pride in the liberal views of her employers because she reasons that they are not like other white families, since they belong to the Progressive Federal Party (PFP). We are introduced to her as she gets a day off in the middle of the week because there is going to be a party on the weekend for 'Master Andrew' who is going off to the army. When she arrives at home, her children are pleasantly surprised, while she busies herself by doing the cleaning, cooking, and other general chores in the house. She is worried about her eldest daughter, Val, who is heavily involved in Power activities<sup>45</sup>. MaChauke is too afraid to ask Val questions because as far as she is concerned,

[q]uestion any of your children's activities relating to politics, and they call the disciplinary committee to deal with you. That's what they call it -- a bunch of presumptuous youths who poked their snouts under your eyes and imprudently asked, 'Mme ubatla hushwa?'(37)

Her moment of awakening is when she realises that she has misunderstood her employers all along. She overhears her madam saying,

Philip dear, will you please see to it that MaChauke is here at five thirty? I still distrust my capacity to deal with blacks. There was a moment during the [party for Andrew] when I knew I'd have lynched any black who'd entered the room even if it had been MaChauke (37).

This is after the countless number of times that MaChauke has defended her employers against Val's talk of revolution saying, '*Nna makgowa aka a buella batho*'<sup>46</sup>. She begins to wonder about the times when her employers had advised, 'Your children were lured into the wilderness by the irresponsible Mandelas and the sensation-seeking Sobukwes. We will win them back with love' (37).

She now begins to think of her other problems, the knowledge that she has had all along that one thing which was very wrong [was] this sleeping-in. She had been trying for some time now to find a sleep-out job. The money was not right. She barely

in which Terry interprets the situation.

Morongwanyane's 'Lone Black Woman'<sup>44</sup>, MaChauke, has worked for the same family as a domestic worker for a long time. She takes pride in the liberal views of her employers because she reasons that they are not like other white families, since they belong to the Progressive Federal Party (PFP). We are introduced to her as she gets a day off in the middle of the week because there is going to be a party on the weekend for 'Master Andrew' who is going off to the army. When she arrives at home, her children are pleasantly surprised, while she busies herself by doing the cleaning, cooking, and other general chores in the house. She is worried about her eldest daughter, Val, who is heavily involved in Power activities<sup>45</sup>. MaChauke is too afraid to ask Val questions because as far as she is concerned,

[q]uestion any of your children's activities relating to politics, and they call the disciplinary committee to deal with you. That's what they call it -- a bunch of presumptuous youths who poked their snouts under your eyes and imprudently asked, 'Mme ubatla hushwa?' (37)

Her moment of awakening is when she realises that she has misunderstood her employers all along. She overhears her madam saying,

Philip dear, will you please see to it that MaChauke is here at five thirty? I still distrust my capacity to deal with blacks. There was a moment during the [party for Andrew] when I knew I'd have lynched any black who'd entered the room even if it had been MaChauke (37).

This is after the countless number of times that MaChauke has defended her employers against Val's talk of revolution saying, '*Nna makgowa aka a buella batho*'<sup>46</sup>. She begins to wonder about the times when her employers had advised, 'Your children were lured into the wilderness by the irresponsible Mandelas and the sensation-seeking Sobukwes. We will win them back with love' (37).

She now begins to think of her other problems, the knowledge that she has had all along that one thing which was very wrong [was] this sleeping-in. She had been trying for some time now to find a sleep-out job. The money was not right. She barely



managed with what she earned -- anything less than her salary would be grossly inadequate (36).

The title of the story places much emphasis on MaChauke as a solitary figure. Since she has a family and is therefore not destitute, her solitude can only be that relating to politics. Winnie Morolo's 'Courage, African Woman'<sup>47</sup> also emphasises the loneliness of the Black mother to activist children. Lines 12 and 13 offer an explanation of this solitude even as her family is around her thus: 'Used to bitterness in life/ I, woman alone'. The loneliness in Morolo's poem, as in Morongwanyane's story, stems from the kind of suffering which these Black mothers are faced with. MaChauke is not part of her daughter, Val's, politics which she neither shares nor fully understands. She is also not welcome in the politics of her employers that are characterised by condescension and hypocrisy. MaChauke too, like the characters examined earlier in this chapter, has no place in the politics of the story. She is portrayed as alone because she belongs to neither liberal politics nor to Black Consciousness politics, because both have no space for her. She is said to be alone therefore because there are only two options given to her. It is ironic that the narrator mentions the presence of Mandela and Sobukwe, both prominent for political approaches that are not presented as alternatives for MaChauke. It is equally interesting that when Mandela and Sobukwe are mentioned, they are allied with Val's politics, not MaChauke. Her politics are not Black Consciousness politics, and she is not seen as supporting either the doctrines of Pan Africanism (Sobukwe) nor non-racial politics (Mandela).

Black women's positions in the economy, especially as domestic workers, comprises a contradictory position where Black women's political and economic position of subordination intersect. Resistance here, often not recognised in these stories as being on par with Black male resistance in the work place, is facilitated by seeing 'white power demystified'<sup>48</sup>. However, there is still what Collins calls a 'peculiar marginality'(1990: 24) because even when they mother white children, these Black women could never be part of that family structure.

## Conclusion

Patricia Hill Collins maintains that 'black motherhood is essentially a contradictory position' (1990:116). This chapter has brought to the fore some of the ways in which these contradictions present themselves. On the one hand is the glorified position of the silent mother which echoes the mother Africa trope. She is hardly ever critical of her son or husband, and at times appears to lack any real understanding of the nature of the politics in which her husband or son is engaged. This trope, however, because it rests so fundamentally on the Black woman character's suffering, perpetuates the notion that Black mothers should live lives of sacrifice.

It also denies the existence of Black women as anything other than supporters of the political action. This serves to deny the participation of many women, themselves mothers and/or wives, in the active thrust of politics. Instead, the mothers in the stories watch from the sidelines. Since most of this literature is influenced by Black Consciousness, and therefore seeks to educate the masses as to the 'Black experience', the consistent absence of Black female activists is worrying. This is especially so when one considers the literature subsequently made available by and about Black woman activists around the time in question<sup>49</sup>.

This position also delegates the women characters to be acted upon, and not to themselves be active agents in the shaping of their lives. When additionally these women work as domestic workers in white homes, several other implications surface. The difficulty in protecting Black children increases here, especially when coupled with the general absence of Black fathers. The only fathers mentioned in these stories are involved in some form of armed combat and unavailable to raise the children. This places the responsibility squarely on the mothers' shoulders.

However, the Black women are unable to protect and raise their children in the manner most suitable to them due to two reasons. In apartheid South Africa, the lives of Black children

were always at risk. Secondly, when a Black woman has to work as nanny for white children, it becomes that much harder for her to be with her own children. As a result the signs of her alienation are obvious. These Black women (characters) are therefore responsible for ensuring the wellbeing of both Black and white South Africa. At the same time, as characters they are denied any real understanding of the politics of the time, whether in the township or in the white households.

Their positions are tenuous in that their children and husbands put them on pedestals, while white South Africa confines them to invisibility. In the stories analysed above, there is no possibility for these Black women to inhabit positions in between these two extremes. As a result where a Black woman character is allowed to act, this action is monitored, and the experience is not told through her own voice.

If we were to hear testimonies of domestic workers, we would realise that the actual state of affairs was very different. When Florence de Villiers, Head of the Domestic Workers Union, relates her story, it is clear that she had a clear awareness of racist dynamics of her workplace. She tells it thus:

I never wanted to be a domestic worker. I did it after I left school until I married at nineteen. Then I continued doing it on a part-time basis. I always hated it. My human dignity was removed from me completely. I was told, 'Do this. Do that.' I wasn't allowed to think for myself. I had to say, 'Yes, yes, yes.' I could never say 'No.' Because I am black and my employer was white, I couldn't convince her that I had a mind of my own and that I wanted to use it. She kept telling me things I knew. It was degrading<sup>50</sup>.

In light of the established aim of presenting 'positive images' of Blackness in literature, it is striking to note that passivity and suffering are perceived as attractive traits in female characters in Black Consciousness literature. These same attributes are presented more realistically in Black male characters, as we have seen. It is equally remarkable to note that the only acknowledged roles for Black women characters are those of mother and supportive wife. The paucity of female activists in

these stories is in keeping with the general silence regarding Black women activists in Black Consciousness.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adeola James (1990): 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Mafika Pascal Gwala. 1988. 'Tracing the Steps', *Matatu* 3/4: 76-95.

<sup>3</sup> The Black Arts Movement was inspired by the Black Power Movement in the United States.

<sup>4</sup> I am referring here mainly to Jayapraga Reddy, and to a lesser extent Amelia House, in exile at the time, and Gladys Thomas.

<sup>5</sup> In Matlou (1986): 65.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Hill Collins. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge: 68.

<sup>7</sup> I use 'struggle' to refer to the collective fight of Black and left-wing white South Africans to bring an end to the oppression institutionalised by apartheid. This definition therefore encompasses both non-violent and armed resistance tactics employed. It, however, does *not* include the 'efforts' of the liberal establishment to bring about moderate reforms.

<sup>8</sup> Matlou's four categories are as follows:

a) the Black woman bound to traditional female roles

b) the fighting woman

c) the Black woman in a manifold conflict regarding her position

d) the Black woman re-encouraging the Black man who has been emasculated by apartheid.

While I agree with the classification, my conviction is that a) and d) are largely coexistent and that it is often in her role as 'mother' or 'wife' that she is expected to re-encourage 'the Black man'. It is rare, for instance, for any woman outside of this realm to be called upon to re-encourage Black man.

<sup>9</sup> In a footnote (no 15), Lewis writes, 'I use the term to define the mother's dynamic and male centred role within a male symbolic order' (12).

<sup>10</sup> In Lewis (1994): 168-9.

<sup>11</sup> In most *Staffrider* stories, especially where the mother is 'glorified', there are no fathers. Most of the stories studied here are based in the urban areas where Black men migrate to. Statistically therefore this would be where most Black men are located geographically. Their absence can be interpreted as pointing to the prevalence of single parent families where the parent is the mother. This absence also implies that all the men are off fighting in the real world, in the struggle.

<sup>12</sup> Feminists (of all persuasions) and womanists have theorised motherhood in various ways. It is important to note, however, that this theorising does not pretend that there is only one way in which motherhood can manifest itself in writing or society. The arguments referred to here are those which are appropriate to the ways in which motherhood is framed in these stories.

<sup>13</sup> One of the many times during which this is made explicit is in the closing lines of a poem by Manabile Lister Manaka (1978) titled 'Black Beautiful Mother'. *Staffrider* 1.1: 35. These read:

You Black Beautiful Mother  
Home you stay  
Food you set  
Love you extend

Boldly and gallantly  
 You who have much to deplore  
 You move  
 You serve  
 You love.

In the preceding five stanzas the speaker describes in details this mother's life. Her husband comes home drunk because of his 'sorrows', but she remains strong even as her 'sons and daughters fall' l. 29 In the poem then, as in the stories discussed in this chapter, the mother is the 'muse' l. 24 who dare not let go of her imagined strength, even as all the members of her family suffer openly. She is described as actively participating only in activities which ensure the survival of her family and these are characterised mainly by domesticity and servitude to her husband and children.

<sup>14</sup> In Stratton (1994): 40.

<sup>15</sup> The number includes times when Africa (sometimes spelled Afrika) is personified as a Black mother suffering and occurrences of the sever-present silently suffering mother. Most of the time the references are explicit. Indeed wherever the continent is mentioned in poetry as a living entity, it is feminised. The two most notable exceptions are the 'hermaphrodite earth' in Kelwyn Sole's 'The Green House' (*Staffrider*. 2.2: 43) and talk of Africa as 'our fatherland' in Mafika Pascal Gwala's 'So It Be Said.' (*Staffrider*. 2.4: 36)

<sup>16</sup> *Staffrider* 1.1: 57-58.

<sup>17</sup> This means a stay away from work campaign.

<sup>18</sup> This is in reaction to a news bulletin that announces, 'The police had no alternative but to protect themselves from the threatening students' (57).

<sup>19</sup> Ndabezinhle means 'good news' in isiZulu.

<sup>20</sup> See *Staffrider* 1.2: 11-15.

<sup>21</sup> See *Staffrider* 1.2: 29-32.

<sup>22</sup> The 'plan' is a course of action which he and several others are about to embark on.

<sup>23</sup> This is a problematic evaluation for several reasons. Foremost of these is the simplification implied in such an assessment. He is in effect arguing that women who are from Soweto do not apply for passes. Secondly, this statement is worrying for its implication that women from the rural areas are unfamiliar with the politics of the pass system, especially when one considers the march by women from all over the country to the Union Buildings in 1956 to protest the extension of carrying the passes to Black women.

<sup>24</sup> S'bongile's name means 'we are grateful' (in isiZulu) while Mojalefa's means 'the heir' (in seSotho).

<sup>25</sup> See *Staffrider* 2.4: 34-36.

<sup>26</sup> In the previous chapter I quoted Biko at length on his criticism of Christianity and calling for a shift in focus. Similarly, in the same chapter Dikobe Martins (1981) asserts that he and his writing were directly influenced by BC thinking.

<sup>27</sup> See *Staffrider*. 2.3: 53.

<sup>28</sup> There is Poshoka, the minister, the drunk, the miner, the young boy/forced to be a man prematurely ['He was a mere boy who was supposed to be at school, but life had long circumcised him.'(35)] who calls himself Doctor Mkhize, and the older man at the end who talks of the manifestations of activism when he was young.

<sup>29</sup> Miss Matseko Manyama, the suffering mothers and the silent women in the train.

<sup>30</sup> See *Staffrider*. 2.4: 60.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

*Loving and Lying Awake At Night.* Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip and Geina Mhlophe's 'The Toilet' and 'My Dear Madam'.

## Chapter 3:

### Sexuality, Permission and the Politics of Definition

Sex is still also a means by which the man asserts *his* authority over a woman (or tries to), based on the assumption that once he has entered her body, she becomes subordinate to him, and he therefore has a right to tell her what to do, especially in relation to the expression of her sexuality. Consequently, one hears men claim that a woman is 'his woman', and many a male ego has been burst in the battle to retain his 'rights' over a woman's sexuality<sup>1</sup>.

A theme that will receive attention now is one which seeks to demonstrate that, in the stories of *Staffrider*, Black women characters' bodies and behaviour are regulated through sexuality. These experiences usually take one of three forms: her ability to perform sexually and/or her rape, her physical appearance, and how she deals with a lonely pregnancy. Her character is then condoned or condemned according to the manifestations of her sexuality. She is (de)valued in accordance with the manner in which she chooses to deal with various sexualised experiences. Depending on whether her behaviour on these three fronts is acceptable or not to the narrator and the society of the story, she is then either put on a pedestal or condemned. Her sexuality is often the only means through which her character has any significance. She is defined solely in terms of what the sexual (im)possibilities in her life are. Moreover, when the woman is violated and/or raped in these stories, she is often forced by the narrator and the violator to bear responsibility for her status as if she were to blame for what happens to her. Her story is told through the words of a male narrator in all the stories examined here; and in the few occasions where she is allowed to speak, it is never to interpret what has happened to her or to state her side of the story.

Jackie Roy (1993) argues that 'complicity and/or passivity are often conditions of Black women being permitted to speak'<sup>2</sup>. In light of Roy's argument it is hardly surprising that these women characters are not allowed to speak. When they do speak, however, their words are used to

reinforce the narrator's ideology. This therefore 'establishes' (due to the lack of any other action) their alliance with the narrators' belief. Although the stories will be divided into three sections, there are numerous areas of overlap in the playing out of these three themes.

### **The lethal cocktail: alcohol and sex**

Is it because we bleed so regularly that everybody thinks we are supposed to?  
Is that the reason?  
Is it because they can hit us that they hit us<sup>3</sup>?

The first theme to receive attention relates to the treatment of women characters who are sexually transgressive. In this trope, the woman character disobeys standards of appropriate female sexual behaviour in various ways. She is severely punished for this to the extent where often the contributory factors (although mentioned in passing) are deemed irrelevant. She never expresses her own sentiments about her behaviour but has to repeatedly suffer the brutal 'consequences' of her actions. Because of her transgression, when she is later raped, the narrator consistently argues that she deserves it. This body of literature reinforces one of the most dangerous and pervasive myths perpetuated by society about rape survivors, that when rape occurs the woman somehow deserves it.

When her sexual activity is deemed inappropriate, alcohol is usually presented as the contributing factor. The manner in which she 'asks for it' is through her intake of alcohol. The argument rests on the premise that the inebriation distorts her sense of what is right and wrong. By extension, the narrators seem to argue that it is partly her judgement that makes her the target of rape. She only has inappropriate sex when she is drunk. Rape is constantly equated with (the possibility of) inappropriate sex.

That she drinks at all is often presented as a problem. This is an act which is portrayed as



unsuitable for Black women and therefore to be discouraged. In all the stories, the punishment for a drinking woman is a heavy price. Having indulged in the forbidden act leads then to the inevitable evil of forbidden sex. Her alcohol intake is directly relevant to what follows, usually impulsive sex or rape. This stance which sees casual sex equated with rape is ironic since it simultaneously appears to be making two somewhat contradictory statements. On the one hand, casual sex is inappropriate and usually takes place only after the Black woman is intoxicated. This implies that this is not an act she would ordinarily engage in, sober. The alcohol then clouds her judgement. However, when a rape occurs her intoxication is used against her. She is then blamed for the rape as if this too were a sexual act, not a violation. This places the responsibility for the rape squarely on her shoulders while she is framed as responsible, and even deserving of her fate. This is simply because without the alcohol, she would have known better than to get herself raped. When she has casual sex under the influence of alcohol, the alcohol is to blame. Violated under the influence, there is the suggestion that she could have avoided being raped had she been sober.

Diane Richardson (1993) argues that it is common for women to be forced into the role of 'gatekeeper' in order to ensure that male responsibility for violence against women is successfully deflected. Consequently, men who rape women are not held accountable and often excused by a range of factors seen to be contributing to the situation of the woman's violation. Thus women who survive rape or sexual harassment are forced to take responsibility for both their own and men's sexual behaviour. Furthermore,

[I]linked to the idea that sex is a natural force, and the concept of sex drive, it is believed that to a certain extent sex is beyond sexual control, more especially for men. The message is that men have powerful sexual urges which they find difficult to control. Women, who are not so troubled, should be aware of this and not provoke men to a point where they can no longer be held responsible for their own actions. This is evidenced in the way men's sexual violence against women has often been seen as an understandable, if not acceptable, reaction to female 'provocation.' Common myths are that women provoke men by the way they dress, by leading them on, and by saying 'no' when they mean 'yes' (Richardson,

1993: 85).

In addition to the existence of these attitudes to the bodies of women who have been violated, 'Black women, particularly African and Afro-Caribbean women, are seen as highly sexed, laviscious and promiscuous' (Richardson, 1993: 78). Additionally working class people of both sexes are seen 'as less able to control their sexual "urges"' (*idem*). These attitudes identified as operational in the ways in which Black women of all classes (but especially poor/working class ones) are represented are at play in the stories analysed here. All of the women characters who are raped in these stories are working class and Black.

Although the myth of women being responsible for their own rapes is not striking on its own<sup>4</sup>, that the violence is racialised in *Staffrider* is relevant. In these stories the rapist is usually a white man. There can be no positive voluntary intimacy between Black women and white men in these stories. As a result then, any 'sexualised acts'<sup>5</sup> are the sole responsibility of the Black woman involved. Because the female is passive and the male active in sexual acts, she is in the desired role where she supports his masculine 'right' to initiate sex<sup>6</sup>. That she has to be drunk to have 'bad sex' further obliterates her decision because the argument can be made that she did not know what she was doing -- she is 'anaesthetised'.

The constant alcohol and rape metaphor when the male is white reinforces several stereotypes that are at work elsewhere in the literature. Because it is somehow 'unnatural'<sup>7</sup> for interracial sex to occur here, if Black women love Blackness and Black men<sup>8</sup>, then in the enforced racial heterosexuality of the magazine, they will have no desire for white men. They need to be inebriated to even contemplate this action, which implies that they are acting out of character. Since a Black woman cannot desire a white man, sex has to be an act of violence. The Black woman character is also used as a symbol of the violence resultant from white male power on Black life and on the country and continent as a whole. Here is the body of a Black woman as symbol of the nation yet

again, the mother Africa trope in a different guise. Because Black Consciousness literature has social transformative goals, the manner in which Black women are represented in the stories published in *Staffrider* has implications that go beyond the boundaries of the narration. Gender theorists maintain that 'violence is both a reflection of unequal power relationships in society and serves to maintain those' (Maynard, 1993: 113). Thus violence or the threat thereof becomes a tool to subordinate women which constructs and maintains that subordination. Mary Maynard argues further that because of the regularity of attacks on women coupled with the constant fear of their possibility, women are then (often) forced to modify their behaviour 'just in case' to avoid assault.

The literature published in *Staffrider* seems unwavering in its condemnation of certain sexual acts by Black women. The stories that are analysed in this chapter are highly symptomatic/indicative of this. There are poems throughout the period covered which contribute to the manner in which Black female sexuality is framed and represented in the pages of *Staffrider*. In Keith Adams' poem 'Morality Acts'<sup>9</sup>, the speaker lists several societal factors and sets of behaviour which are seen in a negative light. The refrain before each one of the eight items on the list is 'We don't need'. The activities frowned upon are those of the arrogant 'peanut revolutionaries' (15), 'pseudo intellectuals' (132) and drunkards (115-19). However, for the purposes of my analysis in this chapter, I will focus on lines 21-28, which present the speaker's disapproval thus:

We don't need people ashamed of their beauty  
     enriching cosmetic firms  
     where features are measured  
     like articles in a store.  
 We don't need loveless sex  
     meaningless relationships  
     rushing to spread your legs  
     'baby it's the in thing'.

These lines foreground two issues which are relevant for the purposes of this study. First, in lines

21-24 the speaker is critical of the use of certain cosmetics. BC activists and proponents were very critical of the role of skin lightening creams and hair straighteners. Many argue that these were reflections of the desire by some Black women to mimic white standards of beauty. The speaker here appears to be echoing this sentiment found repeatedly throughout BC writing. BC proposed that Black people needed to ascribe to different systems of beauty where their Blackness was to be seen as beauty in itself. In the poem, those reprimanded are using cosmetics to deny their 'real' beauty and criticism of their practices is framed in much the same manner as BC criticism of the widespread of skin lighteners and hair straightening creams. Lines 23 and 24 can be read to be a reference to the practices of scientific racism where features of the Other were measured to 'prove' certain points about the 'characteristics' of certain races. The connection between these and the two preceding lines suggests that both practices contribute towards maintaining racist systems of power and domination.

Lines 25-28 focus more clearly on what is framed as inappropriate sexual behaviour. What the 'we' in the poem 'don't need' suggests that the appropriate place for sexual expression is in a relationship defined by love. Any sexuality expressed outside these boundaries is seen as obscene. These lines focus more directly on ways in which *women*<sup>10</sup> are not to give expression to their sexuality. Additionally, judging by the emphasis of lines 27 and 28, these women are somehow pressurised into engaging in this behaviour because we hear a third voice, belonging neither to the 'we' nor the woman 'rushing to spread' her legs. Her behaviour then is not reflective of a singular or minority, but is seen as more prevalent ('baby it's the in thing') and therefore more dangerous<sup>11</sup>. Thabo Mooko's 'You Have No Shame'<sup>12</sup> presents a picture of the 'shameless' 'black girls' who engage in sexual activity as if their actions have no social consequences. The speaker disapproves of the frequency with which they swallow the contraceptive pill as well as of the manner of dress.

is often portrayed as the chief catalyst responsible when Black women characters sexually transgress socially accepted borders. Thus when a woman decides to resort to prostitution, her intake of alcohol is emphasised. The socio-economic reasons behind her decision are played down.

The story 'Lebandla' by Joseph Letsoalo<sup>17</sup> is a lamentation of the manner in which alcohol is seen to destroy the fibre of Black family life, with devastating effects on Black society generally. The writer places the blame for street children and (child) prostitution on the abuses and poverty that are facilitated by alcohol consumption. The overall evaluation/verdict is that when women drink it is considerably worse than when men drink. No explanation of the reason behind this observation is offered.

My people are sinking. First were the fathers, then the mothers too. The boys also followed suit -- and worst the girls too. Maybe another Staffrider can tell us why these things happen (35).

The above is fascinating for the manner in which it illuminates the effect of alcohol on the family fibre. It is because of the alcohol that we are told, 'My people are sinking.' The fathers initiated the process of destruction. Soon the mothers followed, contributing to the demise as well. What is especially worth noting is the introduction of the news of drinking. The manner in which we are told that the fathers and sons consume alcohol differs significantly from the announcement of the mothers and daughters drinking. Each generation has the male as pioneer with the female following suit. This is highlighted by the repetition of 'too' after the 'mothers' and the 'girls'. That mothers and daughters should not drink is clear from the above. It makes the problem larger that the mothers drink 'too', while the worst stage is when 'the girls too' take up the bottle. Although the boys drink after the mothers, they simply 'followed suit' and their behaviour is not explicitly judged on its own outside its impact over the whole process of drinking families. Yet each generation of drinking females has an explicit judgement attached to the announcement of its alcohol

consumption habits. The last stage is presented as the conclusive blow in this naturalised downward spiral because after the girls drink, everybody in the family drinks. Presented as it is, the author assumes that the audience will share in a system of values which deems female consumption of alcohol particularly problematic. This passage also illuminates the role which *Staffrider* is seen as playing in the community. The solution or explanation of the phenomenon is expected from the magazine. 'Maybe another Staffrider can tell us why these things happen', implies that *Staffrider* occupies a position of power and influence. Although the narrator cannot himself explain the root of the demise, it is reasonable to expect the magazine to venture an explanation. The relationship between the magazine and its readership is seen as interactive. *Staffrider*'s role is emphasised as influential on the behaviour of its readers; there exists a possibility that the magazine may offer an explanation later. In both this story and the frequency of poems published between 1978 and 1982 simply labelled 'Staffrider', it is evident that *Staffrider* played a crucial social role and was not engaged in art for art's sake. This is in keeping with the didactic role of BC literature. Teaching its audience about positive images of Blackness, the BC thrust in *Staffrider* makes links between positive images and behaviour. By portraying Black women who consume alcohol in a negative light, the teaching is that 'good' Black women do not (and should not) consume alcohol. There is a causal link established here between alcohol consumption and the violence/rapes which occur in these stories.

'It Does Not Help'<sup>18</sup> illuminates the connections between alcohol consumption and an act of sexual violence. The story is a third person narration of a young woman, Mary's, experience in the Shindig Night Club. Desperate to make money, she goes to the club recommended by her friend Molly as the ideal place for prostitution. The narrator reveals that Molly resorted to prostitution for 'the fun of it' (38), unlike Mary who is frightened by the prospect.

Mary escapes rape on the train, arriving safely at the club whose clientele comprise mainly Black women and white men<sup>19</sup>. As in Matshoba's 'My Friend the Outcast', the behaviour inside the club is narrated in the strictest moralistic tones. A description of the interaction between the white men and Black women inside is described thus, 'all kissing and cuddling and doing things imaginable only to an inebriated or downright filthy mind' (*idem*). Unexpanded upon, this information could be read to condemn two aspects of the interactions taking place in the night-club. The first instance is that of the high level of inebriation which is compared and likened to a 'filthy mind'. Alcohol therefore allows one to engage in behaviour made imaginable only to a 'filthy mind' otherwise. The narrator hints that the behaviour in question is sexual, and judges it as base. Because Mary is there as a prostitute, it is also prostitution which is criticised by the narrator.

Upon arrival a man named Ian, reading her as '[e]asy fresh meat' (*idem*), buys her a drink. Although she denies having a boyfriend, the narrator interjects, 'Of course, like any beautiful girl her age, she had a boyfriend, an educated one for that matter' (*idem*). The interjection creates an automatic connection between a 'beautiful girl' and a boyfriend. Had Mary not been a 'beautiful girl of her age', she may not have had a boyfriend seems to be the logic of this narrator. That the existence of a certain boyfriend interrupts the action of events means that he is important to what is about to unfold. He is educated too, we are told. Mary is framed here both through her looks and her relationship with a man of a certain social standing. It is not at once clear what the significance of the boyfriend is to Mary's story. That she is beautiful is directly responsible for the fact that she has a boyfriend. Does it follow therefore that 'ugly' women do not have boyfriends, and 'beautiful girls' do not have *girl*friends instead?

The first part of the narratorial interjection is exclusionary and detracts from the main action of the story. That the presence of the boyfriend needs qualification, however, attributes more to his

presence than is necessary for the story. Mary needs to consume alcohol prior to contemplating sex with a man other than her boyfriend, and to consume some more upon the realisation, that 'she hated herself for the degradation she had flung herself into' (39). Further,

She was desperate now. Her morals, her womanhood, the very sanctity of her body was at stake. *She was being torn by her good Christian up bringing on the one side, and her outwardly insurmountable plight on the other – the latter being strengthened by the dulling effect of the whisky on her (idem)* [Emphases added].

Here then, perhaps more explicitly stated than in most of the other stories in the section, is the connection between alcohol and sexual behaviour. It is because Mary has had whisky, and is to have even more later, that she can consider prostitution a viable option. She is unable to go ahead with the decision while she is sober. Her resolve is strengthened by the alcohol in her bloodstream, not her desperation for the money. The emphasis on her consumption of alcohol means that her desperation is trivialised as *the* contributing factor. Her desperate measure to solve a desperate situation is deemed immoral. Because of prostitution '[h]er morals, her womanhood, the very sanctity of her body was at stake' (*idem*). Had she taken heed of her Christian upbringing *and* remained sober, she would not have left with Ian, seems to be the logic of the narrator.

Mary, however, becomes more inebriated. Shortly after her second alcoholic drink, she leaves the club with Ian. He then rapes her and steals the little money that she has. When she comes to, she realises that she has not secured the money that she needed to pay her family's three months arrears. Instead she is poorer than she was when she arrived at the club, without even the means to get home.

The gravity of the story, however, lies not in Mary's violation by Ian but in deciding to prostitute herself in the first place. It is a decision that the reader is encouraged to condemn, rationalising her rape as the consequence of bad judgement on her part. Furthermore, that Molly is a prostitute for



the 'fun of it' belittles the factors which contribute to many women resorting to prostitution, reducing it instead to an act by women who are sexually out of patriarchal control. Since female 'promiscuity' is demonised, any woman who has sexual contact with more than one man is therefore immoral<sup>20</sup>. That we are told of Mary's boyfriend before Mary enters the club positions her in this mould. His presence and social standing are thereafter used to judge and frame her position. Prostitution in her case, therefore, is equated with casual sex. The narrator ignores the serious social factors which lead to prostitution even as he includes them as part of the background to Mary's story. Their importance is in providing the setting, while her relationship with her boyfriend and her intake of alcohol are both foregrounded. When Mary decides to explore prostitution, she not only has bad influences (in Molly) she is also vulnerable. It is ironic that even as we know of the circumstances which force her hand, her decision is condemned. Even while the narrator sees her as under the influence of alcohol and therefore not thinking clearly, she is 'punished' by the consequences. This is similar punishment meted out to multitudes of women according to Maynard. Since the target audience of BC literature is Black, the Black women are warned through this story, those similar to it as well as the poems analysed in this chapter. The message is more complex than a demonstration of the dangers of white men (or even 'the white man'). Indeed as explicitly stated in the poems analysed above, it is not acceptable for Black women (and Black women characters) to engage in casual sex or prostitution. While the stories repeatedly see the Black female characters violated as a result of particularly fraternising with white male characters, the poems are not as discriminating. Throughout the pages of *Staffrider*, it is the Black women characters who are focused on as deviant and destructive to the moral fibre of Black society. The didactic message to the Black female audience lies in the threat of violence in any encounter with white men. In the poetry, the Black women (or 'black girls') are condemned for

prostitution and any casual sex even with Black men. In the stories analysed in this chapter, the didactic thrust directed at Black women contributes to systems which ensure that 'women live in a constant state of intimidation and fear' and control over Black female sexuality is thus maintained (Maynard, 1993: 114).

Another example of a woman punished for her position as exploited subject is evidenced in Narain Aiyer's 'The Casbar'<sup>21</sup>. This is a first hand narration by an old man, Ramadu, who was a victim of forced removal. He talks of the days before the removal as happy, and the sadness that he feels when he walks past places like Cator Manor, Manor Gardens and Mayville.

He also discusses his wife and the manner in which their separation came about. She was his maternal uncle's daughter who worked for a white man, doing his ironing. After her first childbirth, they noticed that the child looked white. Some days the wife would come home from work late, a few times she did not come at all. It was on one of the latter occasions that Ramadu and his father decided to investigate the matter. What they found, the reader is told, is as follows: '[t]he torch show this wife him pressing, my wife him pressing' (35). Ramadu thus tells of what he and his father saw when they shone a light into the house of his wife's employer. The two men saw the employer on top of his wife in what appeared like a mutual sexual act.

She is then sent back home to her parents' house without any prior questioning as to her motives, an act which pronounces their marriage over. The story ends without any explanation as to what could have happened; whether she was a willing participant or not. She is simply punished by being sent away. The position of this woman is as one of a list of things that have happened to the man telling the story. There is no exploration of the events that were discovered, no mention of what she had to say in response to being chased away. This absence translates into an omission of her perspective from an occasion which was obviously significant in her life. The reader is

confronted with his version of the events as the only truth, and their marriage as one of a string of issues without much significance on its own.

Similarly, when Martha in 'A Son of the First Generation'<sup>22</sup> gives birth to the long awaited baby, Monde and his family are surprised to discover that the baby looks white. Monde is especially dejected because '[d]uring his courtship with Martha it had occurred to him that he could never be sure of how much he meant to her until she bore him a child' (24).

Because he had waited for her to prove her dedication to him by bearing him a child, that the child is not his own proves the opposite to him. He now looks back in disillusionment at his pride during her pregnancy because he thought no other man would have dared make a pass at her, 'he had lived for nothing else but pampering his "ill madam"' (24) and how he refused to spend any of his money because he was saving for *lobola*.

The status and significance of pregnancy and motherhood is worth exploring in view of the above sentiments. Firstly, the only way in which Martha can show her love and commitment to Monde is by giving birth to his child. He, in turn, shows his arrogance by taking pride in his perceived uncontested ownership of her. While she is pregnant it is obvious to other men that she is not sexually available.

Pregnancy is seen here as a stamp of ownership, a sign that is recognisable to other men. She is perceived as an 'ill madam' during the pregnancy. '[I]ll' reinforces the image of her as passive and helpless, like a sick person who needs to be taken care of. She is also likened to a 'madam' which puts her in the privileged position of having another person do the work for her. She is therefore put on a pedestal and pampered for the duration of her pregnancy. That she is called an 'ill-madam' proves ironic in the end because she is not treated as a madam at all. Her pedestal position is only partial. Only Monde can see her in this way. Before Monde her multitude of lovers did not see her

as such, nor did Monde's friends who constantly wondered about hers and Monde's relationship. Dawie, the father of Martha's child, sees her as very accessible and hence the exact opposite of a woman on a pedestal<sup>23</sup>.

Strikingly Martha relates tales of her previous relationships with men characters as purely sexual, loveless alliances before which she needed to get drunk to avoid confronting the reality of her situation. She tells him that she drank because she needed to be 'anaesthetised before [she] was operated on' (26)<sup>24</sup>. He, in turn, is reminded of the days when he had to convince his friends that she was worthy of his affection when they 'had made him an object of mockery for chasing one girl when the hunting ground abounded with easy game' (*idem*). His friends see women as objects to be hunted like animals, where the position of power to choose and attack is the entitlement of the man who chases. He also had to convince her to be faithful to him assuring her that he is saving her from herself (*idem*).

The image of the Black woman as hunted animal is echoed in the thoughts of Dawie, who has a 'weakness' for Black women (31). He has had to resort to seeking non-South African Black women in the past; the narrator confirms that '[h]is main hunting ground was Swaziland, beyond the borders of the country he so loved, yet so hated for its laws' (*idem*).

His perception of Black women as animals to be hunted is confirmed and played through in the manner in which he corners Martha in the toilet, silencing her protests with, 'I cannot resist you, black girl. You are so beautiful, Martha' (*idem*). Mary Richardson's assertion is at play here again as Dawie, the white male, speaks of an inability to 'resist' Martha. Thus it is Martha who is responsible for what eventually happens to her, not Dawie who is simply a victim of 'powerful sexual urges which [he] find[s] difficult to control' (Richardson, 1993: 85). We are informed that Martha is inebriated when this happens, and this in itself is problematic in two respects. The scene is

later on referred to as a rape (32); yet the fact that she is drunk establishes a connection between the scene and the pre-Monde Martha who had casual sex because she was drunk. Like Mary, therefore, Martha is blamed both for drinking and being raped. In both scenarios the blame for their rapes is placed on their shoulder as the rape is framed as possibly an act of casual sex. This serves to trivialise both these women's experiences of rape, because their consumption of alcohol is made out to be a mediating factor.

Monde's initial frustration with Martha's child is indicative of the hopeful possession that he had wanted to exercise over her body, sexuality and reproductive ability. Her trauma is left unexplored. Here her importance resides solely within her womb. Her sexuality is a commodity passed on from one man to the next, across boundaries of race and irrespective of time and class position. Presented thus, she has no agency because she is 'anaesthetised.' That we are unable to hear her thoughts or explore her feelings is a direct consequence of the story's narratorial technique. The sexualised act therefore is denied its force since it shifts the responsibility away from Dawie, who is helpless in the face of his 'longing', to Martha who should know better than to drink given her past.

Monde accepts the child as his own and the fact that the child has a white father does not lessen his acceptance of the child. The child, born 'coloured', is accepted as a member of Monde's and Martha's family because he is a Black child. Monde's acceptance of Martha and the baby are seen as commendable, and this can be seen to contrast with the treatment she receives from Dawie. Monde is presented in a positive light since, in spite of his betrayal, he is able to accept Martha's child. The narrator ends, '[e]ven a child born out of an act of rape cannot be stripped of his right to exist, once born'(32). This is a dangerous statement because of its vagueness and its claims to general applicability. Ironically this story at once celebrates the generosity of Monde set against the violence inflicted by Dawie, while at the same time not paying adequate attention to the rape of

Martha. Again it is her fault because she was inebriated. Having trivialised the experience of rape itself, its consequences too are out of Martha's control. By generalising from Martha's experience, the narrator asserts the right of children born out of rape to 'exist.' The addition of 'once born' seems to subtly imply that the decision as to whether or not they are to be born is somebody else's. For this reason the narrator steers clear of issues of abortion.

The narratorial interjection however has other dangerous implications. Is this a historical evaluation of the existence of 'coloured' South Africans, and/or is it a statement that decrees the only possible sexual alliance between a Black woman and a white man as an act of rape? Either way, the problems abound. If this is a statement about the birth of 'coloured' children, this complicates their position as Black which is an issue Matshoba repeatedly raises and leaves unresolved in his stories<sup>25</sup>. In addition, it raises important questions about the manner in which rape is seen to occur by the narrator. The story appears to draw parallels between sex across the race line and rape. Similar to Mary's story, it is a white man who rapes a Black woman here. All the sexual encounters between men and women in the same race are consensual, even when they are not 'moral'.

By constantly presenting the inebriated Black woman as the victim of rape by a white man, the stories sustain two myths. Foremost is the underlying implication that a woman gets raped because of some fault of her own (in this case when she is drunk) implying that perhaps sobriety is protection against rape. In addition is the perpetuation of the myth that Black men do not perpetrate violence against Black women<sup>26</sup>. In showing the only rapist to be a white man, there is the corollary that only white men rape Black women.

It is also striking that the only injustice suffered by Black women at the hands of white men in these stories is sexual. There seems to be an overwhelming preference in portraying same sex racial

oppression rather than inter-sexual racism. Instances of racism exist most notably either between white and Black men, and less often between white and Black women. There is a pronounced paucity of white men racially discriminating against Black women. This would not be a problem of its own, had there not been so many stories which focus specifically on interactions between white men and Black women. These stories choose to focus instead on sexual power relations as the only social factor which contributes to the relationship. Even when Dawie expresses his interest in Black women, it is not a sympathy with Black people *per se*, because he is not interested in Black men at all. It is simply the possibility of sexual contact across the colour line which fascinates him. The 'rape stories' also do not present rape as a possibility between Black men and women.

The women characters dealt with in the section, although different, suffer the same manipulation in the hands of the Black male narrators that tell their stories for them. That the women characters' own perspectives are conspicuously lacking from every story is striking. It is also crucial to the success of the motif around sexual power and alcoholism. With one exception, alcohol seems a crucial ingredient in the stories of these women. This is the male narrators' (and perhaps writers') inscription of their fear (of the possibility) that she might enjoy sex or be willing to have sex with either more than one Black man or with white men. As a regulatory mechanism, she cannot (be seen to) enjoy it. Because alcohol kills agency, reinserting (white) male desire while absenting hers, she is represented as merely a used object. Her own desire is monitored by the narrator and thus restricted to a specific bracket/standard of sexuality; that of monogamous heterosexual relations with a Black man informed by love.

But even in stories in which alcohol does not appear, the Black female characters fare no better. The manner in which Liz, in 'Strangers in the Day'<sup>27</sup>, who is married to Jake Modise, is punished for sexual deviance differs slightly from the examples explored thus far. Introduced to the reader as

she steals from them both husbands and money. The husbands are blameless, portrayed instead as the unwitting victims of her temptations. Again here is evidence of the helpless males ensnared by the charms of the seductive Black woman. Liz receives the worst of both worlds. Married to a husband who uses violence to control her, she is later reduced to the status of an evil adulteress. Through her public humiliation Jakes makes her the object of shame on two accounts. She suffers as a result of his public infidelity with Shirley, and because of her affair with the priest. The story ends with her as spectacle while he, (possibly) guilty of similar misconduct, is left unchallenged by the members of the church that were so knowledgeable on his affair.

Had this story been part of the tradition of protest writing which precedes BC writing, it may have been possible to argue that the narration is simply a presentation of moral and societal decay. However, given BC's stated didactic thrust embodied in the literature, it appears that the story sets up a double standard which is left unresolved. As it stands, the story portrays a husband's infidelity as acceptable even as that of a wife deserves public attention. It also condones the use of violence and verbal abuse as an acceptable way of dealing with marital strife, establishing public and private humiliation as acceptable practice within a marriage. There is no evidence in the story that the narrator disapproves of the course chosen by Jakes to deal with any of the issues raised in and by the story. Equally striking is the manner in which the reader is exposed to information about Shirley. As a woman who sells alcohol she is made to bear responsibility for the actions of her male clients. It is primarily towards her that the resentment of the wives is directed and the husbands are, in the main, seen to be under her adultery-inducing spell.



characterisation of the two Black women who do feature in the narrative is wanting in this respect. Mr Rajespery hates Indians because they are all 'unruly Yahoos' who should aspire to behave more like 'Europeans'. He is a man that takes great care regarding his appearance and seeks self-improvement even though the manner in which he interprets this is dubious.

Mr Rajah, on the other hand, is promiscuous and accepts bribes from the parents of his students. He, however, seems to have some element of pride in being Black. The conflict between the two men culminates in a physical confrontation between their respective maids. The women, in submissive positions, take on the characteristics of the 'powerful' men to whom they are attached. The narrator announces, '[t]he fight between the two men took place one day -- not directly, but by proxies' (8).

The two women are denied any space as full characters in their own right by allowing their presence in the narrative only in so far as they represent the two educated, middle class men. As working class Black women they are stereotyped.

In their introduction, the editors of *The Common Thread: Writings by Working Class Women*, challenge the 'image-makers', counting among this category such writers 'who show working-class people as inept and brutish, ignorant and inarticulate' (Burnett et al, 1989: 1). They further point attention to the constant portrayal of working class women as 'stupid/thick/dirty loud/ugly' (1989:3). The descriptions of the domestic workers in 'Gladiators' coincides with the stereotypes of working class women which June Burnett *et al* address in their anthology.

The two women characters are seen as they assume the physical attributes of their respective employers. In the story, as in real life, working class women characters occupy the sidelines or back-of-stage, as waitresses, servants, relatively passive roles, there to serve the leading players or provide comic relief<sup>31</sup>.

exclusive domain of Black men. While Black men are cast in unambiguous positions of suffering, traits projected and highlighted in Black women have little to do with their position as slaves too. For instance, when the narrator sees three women working at the fields like the men, he sees in them,

three black women who reminded me of the three witches in Macbeth, with their gauntset faces. Their deep-set eyes had the wariness of the starving mongrels of Soweto (43).

That these women can be working under the same conditions as the men in the fields (suffering from the same injustice and poverty which in turn marks their 'gauntset' faces) should in the very least earn them the fellow-feeling and sympathy that the men receive, given Matshoba's apparent attempt to stress Black unity in this story. Instead, the poverty that is evidenced on their 'gauntset' faces is seen as pointing towards some 'evil' that they have in them. That these women are emaciated is not a sad fact for the narrator. Instead, he is repulsed by their ugliness. The image of their inhumanness is further reinforced by the next sentence which sees them compared to 'starving mongrels'. 'Mongrel' is interesting in that although the women are allowed to be hungry ('starving'), they are refused human status, but are seen rather as animalistic and despicable in their impoverishment.

The narrator uses animals throughout the story to show immorality or other base human actions. For example, cruelty is compared to 'wild beasts', Koos is called a 'gorilla' alluding to what the narrator imagines to be his brute strength (13). By extension when he refers to the women as animals, he appears to be making some judgement about a characteristic he does not approve of. After all, he does not portray any of the (male) characters he befriends as animalistic. It is only when he dislikes something about the character that he ascribes animalistic features to him/her. Why is it that these women, who are as oppressed and as hardworked as the men, are stripped of

positive human traits when it seems so important to keep these human aspects alive for the men? This contributes to the (lack of) sympathy that the narrator invokes for the women.

It is precisely the treatment of the Black men as sub-human that arouses pity and sadness, while the absence of any human qualities in the women leave them unpitied and revolting. When one of the labourers tells the narrator of the difficulties he encounters on the farm because of the racism, the narrator announces, 'I felt my heart sinking' (16). The narrator engages several of the male farmhands in detailed conversations about their racial oppression. He realises in retrospect and relates about the farm, 'That was the place where I would learn the extent to which cruelty and hatred can turn man into something less than a wild beast' (13).

A similar incident occurs earlier in the narrative as the narrator engages one of the male farm labourers. What is striking about this conversation is the manner in which the man's wife is talked about. It goes thus:

Somewhere along the way I picked up a wife -- made a dairymaid pregnant and had to marry her. She has had four children since, the first born is the naked one you saw closing the gate. She is now pregnant again, and I have no use for her because I know that she keeps bringing forth children who are fated to work all of their lives for whites. I regard myself as a father of slaves (16).

The old man receives sympathy from the narrator for his lot<sup>33</sup> while the position of his wife is left unexplored and therefore unproblematised. She is first 'picked up', objectified as an insignificant piece stumbled upon and kept for reasons that have since lost meaning. Her constant pregnancies seem to occur without any action of his part, so the onus lies solely on her to shoulder the blame. It also shows up the bind which characterises her life concerning reproduction: should she not fall pregnant, she has no worth. However, that she falls pregnant constantly due to a combination of socio-political and economic factors reflects negatively on her<sup>34</sup>. It is not conceivable that she too may partly be a victim. Instead her helplessness is of her own making. Locating her outside of his

suffering forces her into a position where she appears to be colluding with 'whites' to produce a ready supply of slave labour and keep her husband a 'father of slaves'. The narrator appears to collude with this judgement to a certain extent. After all, he too places her in the same undesirable, menacing 'animal' category as Koos and Bobbejaan, Koos' loyal 'non-white' servant.

Positioned as party to her husband's oppression, this woman cannot be oppressed. After all she has as much power as Koos. She enslaves him, like Koos. She is hereby denied her position as an oppressed person. By positing him as the ultimate and only casualty of racism, she is erased from any experience of oppression because she is attributed with power she does not possess. Her position as a poor Black woman in a society which judges power in terms of financial standing, race and sex is mocked by the implication that she has the power of the white farmers. It is ironic because her position is the farthest removed from the position of power and her suffering is multi-layered, yet to allow her the position of 'ultimate victim' would somehow make her husband appear comfortable by comparison. It is a fear that acknowledging her status as oppressed will efface the oppression of the narrator and her husband which leads to the denial of her suffering<sup>35</sup>.

The same author's 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana'<sup>36</sup> is about a young man granted a permit to visit his brother on Robben Island. The bulk of the narration is a description of the journey. He is unsettled by the idea of visiting Cape Town, because he is aware of it as the geographical starting point of Black oppression in South Africa.

On the journey there he sees women on their way to do Christmas shopping. This sees the narrator digressing into the question of whether South Africans have anything to celebrate. These women are described as

mothers who reminded me of chickens with newly hatched chickens, leading their little chicks all over the fowl-run, scratching up the dirt, pecking here and there as if showing the young crowd what to pick out of the rubbish to subsist (12).

As in the previous story, here too when the narrator sees Black women, it is either as animal

mothers or sexual beings. The latter is further reinforced by his thoughts on seeing ‘a “coloured” lass who made me wish I was one of those guys who fall in love instantly’ (14). There is a constant refusal in Matshoba’s stories to see Black women as themselves or to engage with them at any level other than to strip them of all human likeness.

The narrative continues to present the reader with the image of ‘[t]he women next door [who] sang church hymns and, *after a lengthy wailing, paused to laugh like banshees*’(16) to ‘I thought of a friend who used to say “When God makes a woman he’s in real earnest” I thought he had been right. Nature knows that without beautiful *things to admire* life would not be worth living’(16) [Emphases added], on seeing a beautiful ‘coloured girl’ in Kimberley.

To Matshoba’s narrator therefore women exist only to be looked at and interpreted as either sexually available or animal-like, denied the possibility to exist as more complex characters. They are also seldom engaged with in conversation, delegated rather to be the viewed silent subjects that are unthreatening to his narrative and the Black male centred BC message contained in it. This is clear when he says, ‘I wouldn’t mistake a black man and a black woman anywhere in the world. I mean a black woman and a black man, not non-whites’ (19).

This is the response that the sight of his Cape Town contacts, Nomonde and Martin, evokes. He walks up to them and begins to now relate to Nomonde in a different manner, seeing her as ‘the tiny woman [,] [s]o tiny in a very feminine way that I immediately felt like offering her some sort of protection’ (19). This is soon turned on its head, however, as he now wants her protection when he realises that she is ‘not an ordinary skirt-dangling girl’ (19).

Because this Black woman is classified as Black, as opposed to non-white, she is able to take care of and protect a man. This is presented as an affirming position for a Black woman to assume in relation to a Black man. She can look after him (mother him) because she is not an ordinary

‘girl’. The way in which he responds to her is similar to that which he hopes to have her respond in. There is a sense in which they are equally suited to protect and take care of each other. Equal to him by being likened to him, she is no longer a woman but is made into a child (girl) granted ‘honorary male status’<sup>37</sup>. The irony of the situation is that having placed himself so clearly in the BC camp, had somebody white told Matshoba’s narrator that he was no ‘ordinary loin-cloth covered black boy’, the insult in the honorary white status would have been obvious and summarily rejected. That Nomonde is placed in this position also serves to say that most Black women are not like her, they are therefore ‘non-white.’ Here once again is the effacement of the Black woman’s life in all its fullness.

Nape ‘a Motana’s ‘Poet in Love’<sup>38</sup> starts begins, ‘Lesetja, a lad of Mamelodi, is a poet. He loves parties, wine and women. Apart from a cluster of girls who are casual or free-lance lovers, he has a steady partner’ (14). We are introduced to his girlfriend, Mathilda or Tilly, who is ‘conspicuously pretty’ and is shown ‘off like a piece of jewelry’ (14).

Lesetja is a popular poet drawing crowds when he performs at shebeens. His life, however, changes when he leaves Tilly for Mokgadi, who, according to the narrator ‘[t]o be frank ... is somewhere near ugliness’ (14).

Lesetja’s friend, Madumetja, who shares the narrator’s sentiment, remarks, ‘[y]ou are a true poet ....[b]ecause you see a bush for a bear, a beauty for an ugly duckling ... Tell me, why did you “boot” Tilly, such a beauty of a model’ (14)?

Tilly is a one-dimensional figure famous for her beauty, likened to a model (which is the ‘ideal’). However, despite being the embodiment of the perfect woman physically, she has no voice or real presence in the story. She begins to take on the character of a brainless beauty who flies into a rage when she does not receive her usual share of Lesetja’s attention. Not believing she is entitled to an

explanation, Lesetja simply ignores and lies to her until she is forced to give up and leave.

The circumstances around Mokgadi are just as peculiar. She is very dark-skinned and we are told that her father was Zairean. Her father needs to be from outside South Africa, it seems, for her skin to be quite that shade of Black. She also has a flat nose, whiter than usual teeth, thick waist, small breasts and round shoulders. She is posited as the exact opposite of Tilly. Her appearance goes against conventional images of beauty. The Blackness of her skin is emphasised as desirable and unusual. This serves to add to her character's mystical attraction. Lesetja calls her 'Miss Afrika' and 'black diamond'.

Despite claims to the contrary, both women are defined by and placed in the same mould by their poet-lover. Whereas Tilly is a 'beauty of a model' who is 'conspicuously pretty', Mokgadi is 'Miss Afrika.'. Both women are therefore placed in a category where they are largely defined by their appearances which decide their status *vis-à-vis* the onlooker. Both are named and have value to him because of how they look, whether it be aesthetically pleasing or very dark. Now Mokgadi is his 'black diamond' as Tilly once was shown off 'like a piece of jewelry'. Both are seen as adornments for him and therefore largely there for show and decorative purposes. Since this is the extent to which the reader is allowed into his psyche, it can be safely inferred that this is a reflection of his feelings for the two women.

'He often brushes her smooth cheek with the back of his palm and romanticises: 'Pure black womanhood from the heart of Africa!' She giggles' (14). He is mesmerised by her Blackness, in awe of it, almost as if it is something bizarre. He feels the need for someone to fit into the essentialist role of 'pure black womanhood' that can only come from somewhere outside South Africa. Her skin tone is a source of visual amazement for him, calling her 'typically Zairean' (14).

The focus on Tilly and Mokgadi is on their physical attributes. Instead of outlining exactly what

it is that Black Consciousness finds undesirable in conventional beauty (that it is white inspired and mimics this white stimulus), the ideology is distorted to mean that beauty is bad and that the 'ugly' must be embraced. This means also that the male poet is posited as the deciding voice on who and what is to be seen as desirable.

Presented as a newly liberated Black man, changed by Black Consciousness thought, his new life is fraught with contradictions. That he refers to her in the manner that he does echoes the coloniser's image of the colonial subject. While the Blackness would be a source of fascination in order to be dismissed in colonial discourse<sup>39</sup>, here it evokes similar fascination and is spellbinding.

This is the irony of this poet's situation. As soon as he embraces Black Consciousness, he moves further away from its teaching. He embraces seclusion where Black Consciousness propagates the position of the committed poet as teacher in the community. He further rejects those outside Black Consciousness, labelling them as those who want to 'bleach the black race', like Tilly<sup>40</sup>. This also goes against Black Consciousness in that his role would be to win those of 'her kind' through education.

The multitudes of lovers that he had once found irresistible are now 'shed' because the new Lesetja 'hates over-indulgence ... he finds them to be either superficial or immature. "Parasites and staffriders!" he thinks aloud' (14).

The women therefore are like a second skin, shed, like the excess leaves by trees or skin by reptiles in the wrong season now that they have outlived their use. Tilly and her 'ilk are a disgrace because they want to bleach the black race. They clamour to imprison black souls in white skins. Sis' (15).

This diatribe is as much a reflection on him as it is meant to be on Tilly. At one point it is precisely this kind of woman that he preferred. Although he has the capacity to change into the new



'conscientised' man that he is, this same possibility is not open to them. It is equally interesting that although he proceeds to insult almost every woman he has an association with, none of the men who peopled his earlier life are rejected. It appears therefore from his interpretation that only the women are to be rejected (with exception of Mokgadi, who is ugly). His earlier self is their fault since they 'imprison black souls' and are parasitic -- although we are not told how. He therefore is not obliged to assume any responsibility towards them or for his past life, if he can lay all blame on their shoulders.

Tilly's pain is explored in detail only in so far as it can be trivialised and reduced to a point of amusement. While Black women are imagined to share in Black men's pain, when Tilly is hurt she suffers alone. There is no need even to substantiate claims about her parasitic status.

After a poetry reading with the appropriate Black crowd of literature fundis and intellectuals, there is space for socialising. He engages with all the men at an intellectual level, but describes the only woman present thus, '[t]he epitome of an African woman has a chit-chat with Lesetja, not knowing that she is talking herself into the poet's heart' (15). Despite the fact that he is able and willing to engage intellectually with all of the men at the reading, the woman's words fall on deaf ears because she 'chitchat[s]' instead of engaging in intellectual dialogue. She is allowed into the poet's heart to the exclusion of engaging with him at an intellectual level. As soon as she appears, she enters his heart and is soon like Tilly earlier reduced to a mere adornment on his arm. Although she is seen as embodying positive Black traits, the poet treats her in much the same manner he had treated Tilly prior to his conversion.

Although this is a context which obviously focuses on the mind and communication between individuals *intellectually*, Lesetja's reaction to her is framed in relation to her sexuality. None of the women in the story are allowed to talk for themselves. The reader is forced to rely solely on the

because this is the only form of protection available from harassment by the members of the gang.

Sometimes disappearing for the whole weekend, Sitha knows that Sabelo, whom she is meant to look after, will not tell on her. The father's attempts to mould Sitha's behaviour are in vain. The narrator tells it thus,

[i]n Sitha's case, he had tried every possible method to reform her. He pleaded with her and at times adopted a very menacing tone; he begged her to show some consideration for his public image; he appealed to her not to jeopardise her own future; he reasoned with her; threatened her, but all to no avail (4).

Although the father manages to punish Slakes, Sitha's behaviour is unchanged. Slakes suffers more as he now 'elicit[s] giggles wherever he appear[s]' due to the effectiveness of the 'peculiar township telegraphic system' (4).

This crisis in the family sees the mother returning to work closer to their home by transferring to the nearer Baragwanath Hospital. This is also the time during which Martin and Sitha's relationship blossoms. Since he goes to church, sings in the church choir (despite his musical ineptitude) and gives Sunday school lessons, Sitha's parents invite him to Sunday lunch. All goes well until one day when Sabelo, Sitha and Martin are on their way to visit Martin's sick aunt and they come upon the Black Swine, among them Slakes, who chooses to detain Sitha until past visiting hours.

Hours and a soccer game later, the two young men decide to brave their way home without her, only to have her open the door for them. Martin had worried, '[w]e should have gone straight to the police and not procrastinated. Suppose something happens to her? This chap should be hauled in for forcible abduction and possible seduction', to which Sabelo thought, '[d]amn the fellow with his long words and his law' (6).

Sitha emerges as a female character that resists all attempts to regulate her sexuality, insisting instead on doing things in the way that works best for her. This is not to say that she is blind to the dynamics of her relationship with Slakes. It is clear that pursuing a relationship with Slakes is a

survival tactic. By choosing to be in it, she averts harassment from the rest of the Black Swine Gang. This choice allows her to ignore the moralising 'parents' on the one hand and go along with their way of life and to go to church when it suits her, on the other. Her name is interesting in that she chooses to differ from the prescribed behaviour for young women and is in this sense true to her name which means 'enemy'<sup>44</sup>. She resists all attempts to regulate her sexuality; either to choose between the two lovers or conform to her parents' expectations.

In Ahmed Essop's 'Film'<sup>45</sup> when a Black woman stands up against racism directed at Black men who choose silence as their sign of protest, she is called a Black bitch<sup>46</sup>. She slaps the offender for this. The insult levelled at her is directed at her womanness and her assumed sexuality, when the issue that sparked off the conflict is race. She is also left to respond to the insult on her own, with the crowd intervening only after the offender attempts to retaliate. While the scene upon which she initially took part was one characterised by unity among the Islamic men protesting, her support for them is interpreted differently by the staff at the cinema. That the crowd of protesters does not support her as she supports them questions her space within that unity.

Mafika Gwala's 'Reflections in a Cell'<sup>47</sup> is told in the first person by a young man in jail for dealing in guns. The police are trying to force him to confess; he takes pride in the fact that he is a hardened criminal and is as a result not about to reveal anything. Most of his narration focuses on details about his exploits and previous visits to jail and the reformatory. He is quite proud to be a *tsotsi*. The story is told as though to a cellmate.

Now there are a few blokes jiving in the room, with two girls. Another one walked in, school-going (she had a uniform and carried books). This one I hooked into without much effort. It began with small talk. This was her sister's place and they were from the Reef. We switched to fly-taal; Joey had got me used to it. The girl jived so beautifully. The boys' jail had made me rusty (35).

When a third 'girl' walks in, he decides that he is to have her to himself. Her intention or wishes are

immaterial. She is something to be 'hooked into' easily. When this is not easily achieved it is not because of her refusal but rather because he is 'rusty.' It cannot be because of how good she is at 'jiving', because that would be evaluating him in relation to her. If he is 'rusty' then it is not so much that she has expertise as it is his performance that is sub-standard, but even this is not his fault.

Then one of these guys looks at me with contempt. I'm not used to that. With me it's a tooth for a tooth and I give the swine a dirty look too. One to make him cringe inside. He then tried to impress with his Zulu tsotsi-taal. I ignored him. She wasn't pretty, but she wasn't bad either -- she could be had (35).

The scene is a contest between two men with the woman as the prize. The narrator and the 'guy' that gives him a 'dirty look' are in effect fighting over 'the girl'. When they size each other up, it is merely a contest of masculinity with the woman to be awarded to the winner. She no longer acts, but is a field of contestation. The narrator feels superior to both the 'guy' and the 'girl.' In the end all that matters is that 'she could be had'. The narrator is as vulgar as he is a criminal. He refers to her later as 'the bloody thing' and adds, '[s]ince it was getting late I finished my cane and made plans to lay her' (*idem*).

The woman is presented as an instrument of male battle and a sex object purely for the gratification of the narrator. The 'small talk' at the beginning is purely as a means to an end. She remains nameless, known and maligned for her body and the purpose that it serves for these two men, functioning as a trophy. His perverse fascination with the female body and perhaps general enmity towards women is further indicated in his refusal to believe that his friend Dougie has sold him out, so instead he imagines that it is '[t]hose two bitches. We shouldn't have got involved in this. Like I said, one can't blame female weakness at times' (36).

Although he lacks the evidence to support his assertion, it would compromise him too much to accept the possibility of Dougie (a fellow criminal that he holds in high regard) betraying him, so he

chooses to place the blame where it is convenient for him. The Black women in the story, all nameless, are there for his sexual gratification and to shoulder blame that he cannot. They exist purely for his convenience.

In 'The Spring of Life'<sup>48</sup> the narrator, Sandile, relates the cruelty meted out at those Black people who apply for permits to remain in the urban areas. The fact that he does not know his date of birth, coupled to the fact that he is unsure of whether his wife, Nonkosi, gave birth to a boy or a girl is a source of amusement for the officials.

He then proceeds to witness the exchange between a young Black man who is an employee of the pass office and a Black woman who stands in the queue. 'These people are troublesome, my sister', the young Black employee starts,

What papers do you want? ... Let me see. ... Oh, permission to stay? I see. Well, that is easy and not easy. But the most you can get is six months, maybe a year if you are lucky; maybe nothing! Who knows? They mustn't see me talking to you here. Come and see me tonight at my house. I think I can fix your papers. O.K. (22)?

While the narrator is aware that the young woman is being conned, he is not moved to act. He is angered only by the possibility of a similar fate befalling his wife. The anger results not from the perversity unfolding in front of him, only from the possibility of it being suffered by somebody he cares about. He therefore decides to keep his position as onlooker and does not come to the aid of the young naïve woman when the swindler leaves. His worry about his wife's well being is valid since they have lost touch, as a result of not being allowed to live together (aggravated by the lack of a stable place for her to live). When the story ends, he is in fact reunited with his wife and meets his new son.

While the physical location of the story is a place of general Black humiliation, a Black man openly abuses the young woman. That the onlooker does not intervene serves to further contribute to the lack of kinship that exist in all the stories analysed in this chapter. While Black men can rely

chooses to place the blame where it is convenient for him. The Black women in the story, all nameless, are there for his sexual gratification and to shoulder blame that he cannot. They exist purely for his convenience.

In 'The Spring of Life'<sup>48</sup> the narrator, Sandile, relates the cruelty meted out at those Black people who apply for permits to remain in the urban areas. The fact that he does not know his date of birth, coupled to the fact that he is unsure of whether his wife, Nonkosi, gave birth to a boy or a girl is a source of amusement for the officials.

He then proceeds to witness the exchange between a young Black man who is an employee of the pass office and a Black woman who stands in the queue. 'These people are troublesome, my sister', the young Black employee starts,

What papers do you want? ... Let me see. ... Oh, permission to stay? I see. Well, that is easy and not easy. But the most you can get is six months, maybe a year if you are lucky; maybe nothing! Who knows? They mustn't see me talking to you here. Come and see me tonight at my house. I think I can fix your papers. O.K. (22)?

While the narrator is aware that the young woman is being conned, he is not moved to act. He is angered only by the possibility of a similar fate befalling his wife. The anger results not from the perversity unfolding in front of him, only from the possibility of it being suffered by somebody he cares about. He therefore decides to keep his position as onlooker and does not come to the aid of the young naïve woman when the swindler leaves. His worry about his wife's well being is valid since they have lost touch, as a result of not being allowed to live together (aggravated by the lack of a stable place for her to live). When the story ends, he is in fact reunited with his wife and meets his new son.

While the physical location of the story is a place of general Black humiliation, a Black man openly abuses the young woman. That the onlooker does not intervene serves to further contribute to the lack of kinship that exist in all the stories analysed in this chapter. While Black men can rely

on each other for support in the face of a common enemy, Black women cannot rely on Black men. The selective racial unity and the ways in which it excludes Black women characters serves to further emphasise the extent to which they are alone.

## Conclusion

Rape is a crime of womanhating and violence. It is *not* a crime of passion or a sex crime. The victim of rape is *never, never, never* responsible, no matter what she was wearing, where she was walking, what she was doing or who she went out with, had a drink with, married, kissed, flirted with or lied to. Bad judgement and carelessness are not punishable by rape. No rape is ever justified and no rapist has an acceptable reason or excuse. *Ever*<sup>49</sup> [Emphasis in original].

In these stories, as in those examined in the previous chapter, the Black women characters are allocated to extremes. Their characterisations is confined to the binaries of purity or evil, but in both cases they remain without agency. When they transgress boundaries of ‘good’ sexual behaviour for women, they are repeatedly punished. While there are separate spaces for white people and Black people, within Black communities there are male spaces and female spaces. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) maintains that women who transgress these boundaries are punished by the mark of being seen as less than moral and less respectable.

Mamphela Ramphele (1995) speaks of the categories into which transgressive women are confined, she could very well be referring to the manner in which women are characterised in these stories. She puts it thus: ‘You’re a woman [...] If you’re not a mother, you must be a witch. Or a cigarette-smoking whore [or alcohol consuming slut in the case of these stories]’<sup>50</sup>.

Most of the female characters examined in this chapter are classified in one way on another in relation to their (lack of) sexuality. All of them are silent. The male narrators who tell their stories are vindictive and hostile. Whether these Black women are violated through rape or public

'Earth's Child' and 'Black Magic Lady.' Both are published in *Staffrider*. 1.4: 30.

<sup>12</sup> In *Staffrider*. 2.1: 36.

<sup>13</sup> In James Twala's 'Family Planning', published in *Staffrider*. 2.3: 35, the speaker laments the inability of migrant labourers to have 'gay children bounce and romp around' (16), 'busy housewives' (17) or any 'homely smell of food' (19). The speaker laments the presence of 'family planning' because it is bad for the souls of these male labourers. 'Family planning' refers not only to contraceptive device usage, but is used also as a metaphor for male ejaculation after masturbation, or as the speaker puts it:

And then he spills the seeds of nature  
All over his slovenly sheet with half-satisfaction:  
'Family planning,' he whispers to himself (155-57).

It is equally interesting to note that these men who cannot have children because of their living arrangements are said to be 'half-castrated' in l.11. The combined effects of racism (migrant labour hostels and the way in which they are set up) and inability to have children combines to have a near emasculatory effect.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, when Thuli is said to be 'known/by every trousered creature of Umlazi' (12-3) in Senzo ka Malinga's 'The Queen of the Castle is Dead' (in *Staffrider*. 2.3: 29), the effects of her sexuality are felt by her mother, Mama Ndlovu. It is she, not Thuli, who endures the consequences and suffers therefore. Nevertheless, in the future, Thuli 'is going to cry hard' (122). Mafika Pascal Gwala's 'Let's Take Heed', in *Staffrider*. 5.1: 46 warns (in part):

Take heed, sister  
on your nightland beat  
the men that buy your body  
also buy your soul  
as payment they loan you halitosis offer you VD

Black people, let's take heed

(1.23-28)

In this poem too the effects of prostitution are seen as detrimental to all Black people as are the consequences of theft, alcoholism and the threat of police brutality.

<sup>15</sup> It is not entirely clear whether the exchanges are casual sex or prostitution. While the use of 'charm' and the movement from car to car seems to suggest solicitation, the speaker may intend the movement from car to car to simply emphasise the way in which these 'black girls' change sexual partners.

<sup>16</sup> Published in *Staffrider*. 1. 2: 11-15.

<sup>17</sup> In *Staffrider* 2.1: 35.

<sup>18</sup> A story by Letshaba Thubela published in *Staffrider* 2.2: 38-39.

<sup>19</sup> The narrator announces,

The crowd here ... was multi-racial, with the males of the white species and females of the black species being in the majority, all kissing and cuddling and doing things imaginable only to an inebriated or downright filthy mind (38).

<sup>20</sup> This is similar to the condemnation of 'loveless' sex analysed earlier in the chapter. This possibly explains why her boyfriend is mentioned earlier, in order to contrast her sexual encounter with Ian with the presence of a man in her life which she has affection (possibly love) for.

<sup>21</sup> In *Staffrider* 1.4: 35-36.

<sup>22</sup> Mtutuzeli Matshoba's story published in *Staffrider* 2.1: 24-32.



<sup>23</sup> I do not intend here to imply that her position on a pedestal according to Monde is a better or more preferable one compared to the manner in which Dawie treats her. This is simply to illustrate the contrast and the irony between how the different men treat her: as available sexual object or as elevated object. Both Monde and Dawie project traits onto her.

<sup>24</sup> Here again is a link made between 'loveless' sexual liaisons and inappropriate sexual expression for Black female characters. Matshoba's story here communicates a message akin to that communicated by the poems and stories analysed earlier in the chapter.

<sup>25</sup> In several of his stories, Mtutuzeli Matshoba refers to 'coloured' South Africans in a manner which differs significantly from 'Africans.' This is curious in an author who claims to have embraced Black Consciousness so fully. See also his 'Autobiographical Note' in *Call Me Not A Man* published by Ravan Press in 1979. While his 'coloured' characters are embraced as Black under BC, this story offers simplistic analyses about the existence of 'coloured' people in South Africa.

<sup>26</sup> In their submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjies argue that rape was a crime perpetrated by Black men extensively against Black women within the context of the struggle. It is therefore inaccurate to portray white men as the sole rapists of Black women as is the case in the stories studied here.

<sup>27</sup> Meshack Mabogoane's story in *Staffrider* 1.2: 18-22.

<sup>28</sup> Liz is on her way to work when she hears news of her husband's infidelity. Instead of proceeding to work, she returns home to confront her husband with the news of his infidelity.

<sup>29</sup> See *Staffrider* 1.2: 8-10.

<sup>30</sup> The concept of self-hatred is one which has been widely used by Black communities and recorded in various ways by Black scholars and intellectuals across the globe. It essentially refers to the internalisation of white supremacist values by Black people who then associate Blackness with negative and inferior qualities. This may find overt expression as exemplified by the attitude of Rajespery in 'Gladiators' or it may be subtler with Black people hating aspects of the culture or physical traits associated with Black people. It has been dubbed self-hate because it is a position which means that (according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o) one has not decolonised one's mind, or (according to Black consciousness) that one has not attained psychological liberation.

<sup>31</sup> See June Burnett et al. (eds). page 3. The servants in 'Gladiators' are described thus:

The fight between the two men took place one day -- not directly, but by proxies. Anna, slender and tall, represented Mr Rajespery; Elizabeth, fat and short represented Mr Rajah. The battle had its origin in a squabble which started after a basin of dirty water had been emptied over Mr Rajespery's Citroen. ... The two women now took on the language in an African tongue. They spoke menacingly and shook their hands wildly...The two clasped naked bodies were rolling on the pavement again (*Staffrider* 1.2: 8-10).

<sup>32</sup> See *Staffrider* 1.4: 11-16 and 40-46.

<sup>33</sup> The narrator remarks, 'I felt a touch of compassion for the friendly farmhand. The reason behind his staying at the farm were beyond his control' (16).

<sup>34</sup> There is a variety of possible explanations for why she has as many children as she does. The most obvious could be due to the lack of access to contraceptive services. She is also unable to terminate any unwanted pregnancies. It is also possible, however, that the constant pregnancies are her way of ensuring that she is well looked after in her old age. There could be many other reasons, but with all of the three explored above, her pregnancies are not simply a matter of choice. Nor are they a carefully thought out plan to trap her innocent, helpless husband.

<sup>35</sup> I am indebted to Kimberley Yates for this insight. Her theory is that when oppressed groups

identify one factor as central to their oppression, they marginalise those groups which have more than one identifiable oppressive factor. This for example lies at the base of two historically familiar phenomena. The first is that which has been common throughout many revolutionary movements which seek to attain liberation from institutionalised racism. It feeds into the myth that Black women are safe and in a better position in relation to white male power than Black men. It has also led to the recent denials of homosexuality as a real (Black) issue and therefore refusal to admit that homophobia and heterosexism are oppressive. This would also go some way towards explaining why race and class have taken so long to be taken seriously as feminist issues.

<sup>36</sup> See *Staffrider* 2.2: 10-21.

<sup>37</sup> See Ramphele (1991b): 219-221. See also Ramphele (1996): 99-117. She discusses the theme further in her interview with Yates and Gqola in Appendix B of this dissertation.

<sup>38</sup> Published in *Staffrider* 3.1: 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> Colonial Travel writing focuses greatly on physical attributes/characteristics and skin colour of the colonised. It is exotic and feared. See Zine Magubane's 'Why Can't Women Be Noble Savages Too? An Exploration of Mission Ideology and the Politics of Appearance', Paper Delivered at the Gender and Colonialism Conference, January 1997, University of the Western Cape.

<sup>40</sup> In direct contradiction to the ideology that he claims to have embraced, the artist here sees himself as above and isolated from the masses. We are told, 'He even feels a strong compulsion to live like a hermit, but he still loves the city hubbub which affords him some raw material' (15).

<sup>41</sup> This is a story by Mothobi Mutloatse published in *Staffrider* 1.2: 47-8.

<sup>42</sup> A story by Mbulelo Mzamane in *Staffrider* 1.2: 4-6.

<sup>43</sup> The people that she lives with are her uncle and aunt but they act as parents in her life.

<sup>44</sup> Sitha used as a noun means 'an enemy' (isitha) in isiZulu and as a verb means 'to shadow' (ukusitha) in isiXhosa and isiZulu. The latter does not appear to be an appropriate meaning because she would have to be 'shadowing' somebody else (who was not in favour of being 'shadowed') for the second meaning to apply here.

<sup>45</sup> See *Staffrider* 1.3: 29-30.

<sup>46</sup> There is a controversy over the film, 'The Prophet' in the Muslim community. Halfway through a protest (there is confusion over whether the Indian representatives are to be allowed into the Theatre or not) a Black woman challenges the manner in which the staff of the establishment treat the Muslims. The exchange take place thus:

'Why do you want to interfere with them?'

'I am not interfering. I am only trying to be helpful.'

'They do not need any help. Go back into your cinema. I am sure they don't want to enter your Whites-only cinema.'

'You black bitch!' the doorkeeper shouted. 'Who are you to tell us?'(30)

<sup>47</sup> Published in *Staffrider* 4.1: 7-9.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Kunene's story published in *Staffrider* 4.4: 5-9 and 48.

<sup>49</sup> Pearl Cleage (*op cit*): 30.

<sup>50</sup> Ramphele says this in an interview with Mark Gevisser published in *Mail and Guardian* October 27 to November 2, 1995.

## Chapter 4:

### Capturing the narrative

Say No, Black Woman  
 Say No  
 When they give you a back seat  
 in the liberation wagon  
 Say No  
 Yes Black Woman  
 a Big NO<sup>1</sup>

Agency, in whatever form, is not a prescribed activity for women<sup>2</sup>.

The bulk of the stories analysed in the preceding chapters highlight the plight which Black female characters face in the hands of hostile narrators. Characterisation has thus far unanimously portrayed these women as one-dimensional caricatures. Their function has been largely to illuminate either the male characters or the greater message of the stories. As a result, in the stories analysed thus far, the Black women characters are always supplementary and stereotypical. While the male characters by and large tend to span a range of personalities (which is not to say that all of these are well-rounded) their female counterparts simplistically approximate the virgin/whore axis. Black female characters studied thus far are presented in an uncomplicated mould where their importance to the narrative(s) derives from a single aspect of their character; their motherhood or their sexuality.

The literature which will receive attention now inverts the expectations established by the material previously dealt with. Here I will examine Black women characters represented as complex and dynamic characters who have agency regardless of whether this is perceived as 'positive' or 'negative'. Their characters are shaped without the prohibitions imposed by a crude repetition of the virgin/whore axis explored in the last two chapters. Often these characters are presented as central agents to the progression of the narrative, different from the mainly

supplementary roles projected earlier in chapters 2 and 3. In this chapter, for the first time in this study, there is evidence of Black female characters who inhabit roles unexplored before, who repeatedly are equipped with the ability to present their own perspectives, and so forth.

Women are seen as strong, ugly, frightened, angry, assertive, vulnerable -- usually not pretty and *never* as easy symbols. They're real. [...] Works are both reflective and militant. In the materials selected, images derive from the particular<sup>3</sup>.

These characters are celebrated through their diversity in these stories. Consequently, it proves difficult to define what their characteristics are by way of simple introduction, as was possible with the earlier chapters in which the women characters were caricatured. These characters take shape in hands of male and female writers alike. Some of the same writers whose stories have been analysed in the previous chapters have stories that feature here. This points to some of the ambiguities confronted by writers identified as BC writers, most notably Miriam Tlali and Muthobi Mutloatse<sup>4</sup>. In several instances these characters are permitted by the writer's pen to speak out against the narrator, highlighting even further their difference from earlier Black female characters. Where earlier the women characters were shaped completely by the narrators, spoken for and often silenced, here they are permitted by their writers to challenge narratorial voices. This also highlights the difference with which these characters are treated by the authors of the stories. Where previously Black women characters have been silent, brutalised and at the mercy of the narrator, here even the narrator's authority is questionable. Like the women addressed in Gcina Mhlophe's poem above, they are able to 'Say No' to the limitations of being the objects of description.

Sandwiched between the kinds of literature previously analysed, these stories and poems appear to undermine the themes carried in the former. Here the authors/poets appear to be branching off from those limitations explored earlier. That they are part of the shortest chapter testifies to their paucity, but their variety challenges the trends they continuously undercut.

Mothobi Mutloatse's 'The Motherly Embrace'<sup>5</sup> introduces a relationship between a mother and Samoele, her activist son. Although the action in the story is catalysed by Samoele's

imprisonment, the mother's behaviour stems from her own determination and individual decisions. When the news of Samoele's detention reaches his parents, his father has a nervous breakdown which leaves him mentally incapacitated for the remainder of the story. His mother, on the other hand, refuses to suffer silently awaiting the moment at which another will act on her behalf. While she is framed, in part, as an activist's mother, she behaves in a manner markedly different from her earlier counterparts. Whereas they were important to the narrative as an illustration of motherly suffering which is then interpreted repeatedly in chapter 2 as a sign of strength, here the mother figure refuses to suffer silently alone. Instead she is invested with agency. The mothers in chapter 2 were constructed mainly to highlight the extent to which mothers suffer because of the disintegration of their families. In this instance, Samoele's father is the one who is incapacitated by the suffering while his mother is filled with rage. Unlike Matshoba's mother character in 'My Friend, The Outcast', Samoele's mother is not only able to experience rage, she is willing to embrace and act on it.

She is not stoic in relation to her son's incarceration but allows herself to be consumed by rage. Having sworn revenge she determines the course of the narrative by making proactive choices. Firstly, she investigates where her son is being interrogated and insists on seeing him. Although she is at first refused any access to him, she makes such a 'nuisance of herself' to the authorities that she is indeed eventually able to see him. Her resolve here will not be swayed by the attitudes of the officials.

Upon seeing her, the son looks into the mother's 'big and murderous' eyes and then runs into her arms screaming that he is free. Given the background to the manner in which mothers have been portrayed so far, that this woman's eyes are 'murderous' alerts the reader almost automatically to the fact that this mother should be perceived differently. In the previous chapters mothers suffer silently and passively. That this character is permitted the amount of anger described in the narrative immediately sets her apart from the mothers analysed earlier in this study. Her anger

motivates action, not self-pity. She embarks on a search to locate where her son is incarcerated because she refuses to be a passive victim of circumstance. Having resolved to find her son, she is determined to see him despite all odds and even the officials eventually submit to her will.

The narrator concludes the story, '[h]e had reached his Canaan! The loving mother embraced her son. With an okapi knife which had been hidden in her bra, Samoele would stammer no more' (48). Samoele's mother refuses to behave in the manner deemed appropriate for mothers under racist-capitalist-patriarchy<sup>6</sup>. Unlike the mothers in the stories previously analysed, she follows her own decisions through. She refuses to allow herself to be relegated to the margins of the narrative action. Instead, she elects to control both with startling results. While the father has been rendered impotent, the mother resolves to act. She frees her son by killing him. That she does what is supposedly so 'unmotherly' makes her solution all the more phenomenal. It is interesting that elsewhere when the mother's son is killed, it is contrary to her intentions; the death of the son is the act which immortalises her as the silently suffering figure because she is defined so much by her situation of helplessness<sup>7</sup>. Here, however, in killing him herself, she defies what has so far been presented as motherly behaviour. She *acts* where before other mothers have simply *reacted* to previously determined actions.

She is the first woman character to be allowed to act in an unsystematic fashion. In authoring the stories in the preceding chapters, it appears at times almost as if the authors are following a set method. She is allowed a range of feeling previously denied other Black women characters. This is a range which is directly at odds with standards of 'appropriate womanly behaviour' set up and repeatedly reinforced in the stories in the earlier chapters. Thus, although she is presented and referred to as Samoele's mother, she has attributes which are not necessarily tied to that role. This story then treats her role as mother as simply one of the attributes which define this character. As a mother she is angered by her son's incarceration. By killing her son, however, she undermines the ideological thrust of the stories analysed in the previous chapters. She engages

in 'unmotherly' behaviour by allowing her emotions to come to the fore and acting on them, instead of suffering stoically. Samoele recognises the murderous impulse in his mother's eyes and runs towards her announcing that he is free. Thus this mother is able to do what none of the mothers in chapter 2 attempted or were permitted to do: free her son. In her act of killing her son, she steps outside of the mould of the mothers portrayed in chapter 2, because in killing Samoele she is acting as much for him as she is for herself. Her act kills him and sets him free from the torment of political detention. At the same time she is able to unleash her anger at the system which has started to brutalise her family. This is not the only incidence of a murderous mother in literature and/or mythology. Toni Morrison, a writer who constantly inverts societal expectations of the character 'mother', has asserted about Sethe, a murderous mother in *Beloved*,

A woman loved something other than herself so much. She had placed all the value of life itself outside herself. That the woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she would not see them sullied. She would not see them hurt. She would rather kill them, have them die (Naylor, 1985: 584).

Kimberley A. Yates (1996) has argued that Morrison's murderous mothers kill their children rather than see them as slaves. 'In order to avert pain, these [...] mothers privilege death as a release from pain' (Yates, 1996: 26). Samoele's mother acts similarly and is motivated by a similar desire: to free both herself (from pain and anger) and her son (from torture and imprisonment). Thus as she kills her son she rejects the possibility of being a mother suffering silently. Mutloatse allows this mother room to manoeuvre, and allows her to reject the victim status accorded to the mothers in chapter 2. She is able to set her son free in both a political and a spiritual sense, if these can be separated. He will no longer have to endure the treatment of the State, but having reached his Canaan, he will also no longer suffer emotionally/spiritually. Mutloatse inverts not only the archetypal mother figure in literature by allowing Samoele's mother to free her son and assume agency, he also inverts the male/female dichotomy in literature and society. Samoele's mother stabs him to death. Thus the mother not only assumes agency, but penetrates the body of her son with the knife delivering him

from suffering. Here, Mutloatse's technique is in conversation with the women characters in chapter 3 as well. Whereas penetration was violation and a means of control for them by their rapists, Mutloatse here adapts the metaphor of penetration to suit other ends. It is a female who penetrates the male, unlike the reality. Additionally, it is a mother who penetrates her son, even as societal dictates condemn penetration between members of the same blood family. Thus, in Mutloatse's story, when the angry female character penetrates her son with the knife, it is an act of liberation for both of them. Marina Warner (1987) argues that child-murdering mothers, like Medea, 'contravene the most fundamental criterion of femininity -- maternity love' (7). She also argues that stories about the archetypal mother are a myth, which is to say, 'a kind of story told in public, which people tell one another [...] [its] own secret cunning means that it pretends to present the matter as it is and always must be' (13).

In Winnie Morolo's 'Thula Sana Lwam'<sup>8</sup>, the speaker is a mother singing a popular lullaby to her child. To make her child stop crying she expresses some of what she would like to see as well. The child needs to calm down, but in singing the lullaby, the mother in this poem exposes her aspirations. She longs for a day when her extended family will be restored to her, a day when every member of her family will not be forced into various positions of resistance to the government and forced apart physically. Here as the mother takes care and rocks her child, she dispenses knowledge to her son and airs her own suffering (because her family has been ripped apart) with her child's cries. This figure of the mother as knowledgeable is not limited to Morolo's poem. In Miriam Tlali's 'Soweto Hijack'<sup>9</sup> Masoli relates the story of how the buses destined for Steve Biko's funeral in King Williams Town were 'hijacked' by the police and the mourners jailed. She tells the story to a woman neighbour. There are several markers, which link the story to BC: the mourners are going to Steve Biko's funeral, one of the founders of BC. In addition to this, Masoli, the first person narrator, speaks of the Black policeman who points a gun at her as 'something resembling the face of a black man dressed in camouflage uniform' (12). It is not only because of the teargas that the



policeman is said to 'resemble' a Black face, it is also because of the contempt with which BC proponents held Black police officers, labelling them non-white. It is clear that Masoli has aligned herself to BC<sup>10</sup>, and Tlali has repeatedly asserted that she was a BC writer.

Tlali's story has clear parallels with Morolo's poem when Masoli takes care of a twelve year old girl who is also to have boarded the buses. Masoli begins to take on the role of 'othermother'<sup>11</sup> to the girl. Not only does Masoli reassure the little girl constantly, but the relationship between them is clearly cast as that of othermother and otherdaughter. The girl constantly asks Masoli for advice and ways of coping with the fear, relying on Masoli to be the source of both protection and knowledge. Masoli, in turn, agrees to tell the police that the girl is her daughter travelling with her en route from work, even as knows 'no one would believe that [she] was "from work" at that hour of night' (13). Additionally Masoli and the child occasionally imitate the biological connection between foetus and pregnant woman<sup>12</sup>.

Masoli repeatedly speaks of her wish to protect the girl-child as well as the sense of kinship felt by both Black men and women/girls in jail. While the story stresses Black solidarity at several points, Masoli makes it clear in her narration that the torture of the Black women and girls was gender specific. Thus, while all Black people are mistreated by the police officers when they arrest them, the experience of this torture is gendered. This neither takes away from the ability of all the prisoners to unite, nor makes the one experience more important than the other. Instead Masoli, and hence Tlali, narrates both female and male experiences are part of the more general 'Black experience'.

Thandeka, in 'Sweet Are The Uses of Adversity'<sup>13</sup>, is another woman who defies all attempts to define and control her. As a young woman in love with a Shangaan man she is frustrated by the disapproval of her parents. Thandeka constantly has to defend her right to be with a partner of her own choice. She also makes numerous attempts to make the parents understand what it is she sees in the 'coal-black, big-nosed and pimply' Shikhetho. He possesses great

'intelligence and respect', which is what makes him a 'gentleman' and she is determined to marry him regardless of the consequences to herself (47).

Her explanations receive no sympathy from her father, who instead rebukes her for disrespect and threatens to throw her out of home. It is clear that only Thandeka's complete obedience will ensure happy relations between daughter and father. This is not the manner in which she wishes to live her life, however, and when the family wakes up the following morning Thandeka has fled.

Her decision is motivated by her father's threats the previous night. Since he has made it clear that there is no room for disagreements in his house, Thandeka leaves. She does not wait for him to throw her out but decides instead to leave on her own.

Through the act of her voluntary departure she rejects the 'tribal'<sup>14</sup> prejudices of her parents which fuel their dislike of Shikhetho. However even as she rejects these, she too confirms racist and colourist myths. Shikhetho is not simply 'ugly' because he is darker than Thandeka and her family, he is ugly to Thandeka too. She has therefore not rejected racist aesthetic standards *per se* because dark skin and a flat nose are recognised by Thandeka as ugly even as she chooses to be with him. However, this is a contradiction which she is aware of, because these traits are explicitly interrogated in her argument with her father.

Thandeka's mother suffers along with her father due to her quiet support of her husband's rule over their daughter. Both parents are equally responsible for Thandeka's departure. Here then, the parents equally share blame because the perpetuation of the *status quo*<sup>15</sup> is a societal issue that needs the attention of both men and women. It also affirms Thandeka's right to choose whom to love, and validates her final decision to leave after she has failed to convince her parents of their shortcomings. Thandeka maintains the right to make her own decisions about how to live her life by thoroughly rejecting restrictions on her behaviour. Since her father has set down specific rules as a precondition to living under his roof when Thandeka wishes for a different life, she leaves. She is

unwilling to listen to her father for its own sake and decides instead to choose her own life path.

Jobman, in a story of the same name<sup>16</sup>, is a Black labourer, labelled mad because he is openly defiant of white rules. Unlike many of the other Black labourers on the farm, he disobeys orders from the white owner and generally acts on his own accord. He returns to steal back his girlfriend, Anna and their child. Anna's father, Pyp, acts similarly to Thandeka's father when he tries to persuade Anna to go back home. Confronted with Anna's refusal to obey him, he too attempts to force her into submission by trying to kidnap her back. To accomplish this, Pyp enlists the help of several fellow farm workers. Alert, however, Jobman shoots and kills all but Pyp. He is then forced to flee with Anna and their child for shelter elsewhere.

All on the farm think Jobman stupid<sup>17</sup> because he is mute, even while he very cleverly outsmarts the police and farmer for several days before he is eventually killed. Anna, in like manner, is quiet; and it is this shared silence which defines and strengthens their relationship.

Together they believe in and fight for a different life, where they have to obey neither the farm owner nor Anna's father. Because Jobman is 'mad' there are no prohibitions or limitations placed on Anna within their relationship, and this in turn allows her to give full expression to her own madness<sup>18</sup>. Within their relationship strength is not derived from the ability to issue orders. It is defined by the ability to share responsibility and action as they share parenting and carrying the load on their journey. Jobman carries the baby on his back, wounded, for days, while Anna carries the other materials that they journey with.

Their strength, however, depends so desperately on each other that both are conquered upon separation. When Jobman leaves Anna with his uncle, he is caught and killed by the same group of people he had outsmarted and outpaced wounded for days. Anna is forced to return to the life she so clearly rejected.

It is clear that her silence in the narrative is indicative of her inability to speak for herself in her life; and that with Jobman there is no need to speak because he, silenced himself, understands

her silence. Silence is a trait which labels them weak and defines them as outcasts. However, it is affirming in their relationship because they both understand each other's silence. Silence within Anna and Jobman's relationship therefore is a strength. Both lovers refuse subjugation and go to great lengths to pursue an alternative life. The use of brute force, however, ensures that they both are unable to achieve this end. Because their strength derives so basically from their togetherness, it is through their division that their dream is obliterated.

The woman narrator in 'The Rose Patterned Wallpaper'<sup>19</sup> suffers a similar fate. She refuses to sit at home while her husband works in the city, Cape Town. Approached for advice her supportive mother affirms the narrator's feelings by responding, 'Your man needs you as you need him. I hope you find a place so you can be a family. A family must be together' (23). With her resolve strengthened by her mother's words, she embarks on a journey in search of her own happiness. Although they are poor, the couple build a home from flattened paraffin tins and he buys rose patterned wallpaper for their house.

Her happiness is interrupted by the news that Modderdam is to be demolished and the people forcibly removed. Despite the resistance, in the end she too loses her home. The story ends with her homeless and forced to go back home to stay once again with her mother. Whenever Lucas, her husband sends her things, she remembers the days when they lived like husband and wife.

Like Anna she too refuses to passively assume the role deemed appropriate for her under white supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy. After all her life takes the turn that it does because of her position specifically as a *poor Black woman* in apartheid South Africa. Had she been a white man (regardless of class), she would have had access to the possibility of better living standards. Had she been a white woman, she would not have had to be separated from her husband in this specific manner. Were she a Black man oppressed by race and class, she would have been the one in the city. It is therefore because she is not allowed to work in the city (like Black men whose labour was

essential for wealth creation in apartheid South Africa) that she has to ultimately return home.

Although apartheid legislated that her family be separated, she openly defies it by seeking to unify it. Brute force, this time in the form of forced removals, destroys this dream of a different life for the narrator as it had for Anna previously.

Feminists have for decades argued repeatedly that the 'normal' bourgeois family is an institution which generates patriarchal oppression. While there is obvious validity in this assertion it is important to note (and this is a fact that many feminists choose to ignore) that such a situation is both race and class specific. There is after all nothing bourgeois about a working-class family, or is there? What then are the consequences of the assertion for working class women of all colours? Additionally, given the history of Black families under racist structures everywhere, it is highly simplistic to equate the family with oppression. I have argued elsewhere<sup>20</sup> that it is unrealistic to proclaim, as many feminists continue to, that the Black family is merely a patriarchal institution and one which Black women should seek to liberate themselves from. This is so because, while there is undoubtedly patriarchy in Black families and communities, the centuries old threat that Black families have had to endure of disruption from racist structures makes it unrealistic for white feminists to expect Black women to reject family in the manner that white middle class women can. Family has been much more than merely an oppressive site for many Black South Africans. I reproduce here part of an argument I have made elsewhere,

The Black family in South Africa has traditionally proved to be an essential support system when, for example, young Black men are in the cities and/or Black women are working in the kitchens or factories of white South Africa. Who takes care of children of working class Black children while their parents are away selling their labour cheaply for the preservation of white capitalist South Africa? These children are without paid nannies, unlike white children the country over. Relatives could be called upon look after these children (1996:6).

Support from the family was not confined to work related situations. Institutional racism has always separated Black families and this is a phenomenon which is not limited only to Southern Africa. When this woman defies the laws which deem it impossible for her family to be together, she is

actively challenging the right of racist-sexist institutions to rule her life.

Additionally, I have argued elsewhere the Black family and Black motherhood 'cannot be perceived as a burden [or merely oppressive] when it is effectively something you are prohibited from participating in'<sup>21</sup>.

Further, as bell hooks<sup>22</sup> states,

Some white middle class, college-educated women argued that motherhood was a serious obstacle to women's liberation, a trap confining women to the home, keeping them tied to cleaning, cooking and child care. Others simply identified motherhood and childrearing as the locus of women's oppression. *Had black women voiced their views on motherhood, it would not have been named a serious obstacle to our freedom* (1984:133) [Emphasis added].

and Angela Y. Davis argues,

Their [white middle class feminists] theories and practice have frequently implied that the purest and most direct challenge to sexism is one exorcised of elements related to racial and economic oppression -- as if they were such an abstract phenomenon as abstract womanhood abstractly fighting sexism and fighting back in an abstract historical context. In the final analysis, that state of abstraction turns out to be a very specific set of conditions: white middle-class women suffering and responding to the sexist attitudes of white middle-class men and calling for equality with those particular men. This approach leaves the existing socio-economic system with its fundamental reliance on racism and class bias unchallenged (1990:18).

After all, the Black family has been a site of contestation since the onset of colonialism and slavery<sup>23</sup>. White feminists could afford the luxury of rejecting home for work outside of domesticity. This presented some liberation. Black people have had their families forcibly torn apart by racist structures for several centuries now. Family, then, has been a site of affirmation providing the strength to deal with outside world. This is not to say that Black families are free of patriarchy, but rather to emphasise the presence of many other positive factors which Black people have needed and continue to need to deal with the effects of racism.

Most work outside of the home has been dehumanising for many Black women and men in South Africa. As domestic servants in white homes Black women left their home to only be re-domesticated (predominantly) by white South Africa.

There are therefore no contradictions in this woman's actions. That she goes in search of her husband means that she actively defies those laws set up by white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy. Staying at home with her mother and raising her child without the help of her husband would be submitting to these.

Both she and Anna defy the systems that seek to maintain their subjugation, and suffer the consequences. They stand out in sharp contrast with women in the earlier chapters who passively awaited salvation from their male partners. Even as they lose against the system they are not pitiful victims without agency. Instead they are women with the will and determination to fight for themselves. In the end they do not win against apartheid, but to create characters who win against apartheid in the late seventies and early eighties would be idealistic.

The unnamed young woman in 'Lomthwalo'<sup>24</sup>, a female activist, inverts the expectations of all male activism celebrated in detail in previous stories discussed. She is in a wheelchair due to a bullet lodged in her spine. The reader is permitted into her thoughts as she pages through the family photo album on her lap.

However, unlike the celebrated male activists in previous chapters, she is alone. She has neither the comfort of a family nor loyal friends. The bullet in her spine has had a dramatic effect on how she is now treated by her former friends and boyfriend. From within herself, and with her detained mother in mind, she musters up the strength to learn to walk again. So motivated is she in her resolve to walk again that even the constant pain and failure do not sway her. This female activist is shown to have a relationship with her mother that is unlike that which male activists in previous chapters have with their mothers. Courage is that which she both receives and returns to her activist mother and their reciprocity refuses to allow silent suffering. Because both mother and daughter are activists, they provide strength for each other.

This female activist, unlike the many male activists that are heralded as heroes, is alone, abandoned by even those close to her. Yet, even in her loneliness she refuses to be conquered. In

needing to be strong for her mother, she inverts the mother-child stereotype where the mother is meant to be a constant source of strength and the child the mere receiver of this strength. She also refuses to be silent about her mother's suffering, thinking about her being tortured at the same time that she faces her own pain. The onset and relevance of pain is explored in detail as the young woman seeks out ways to deal with both her own and that of her mother's.

In showing both mother and daughter to be activists, the story breaks the tendency critiqued in the earlier chapters which sees women watch the political action from the sidelines. Both these women are active and it is important that they give each other encouragement. After all, it is the thought of her mother which sees the young woman determined to walk again. It is also the knowledge that she can be a source of strength for her mother which sees her think of their collective pain.

Spinky in 'Gone Home Simpasa'<sup>25</sup> is an equally defiant character because she assumes the role of conscientising the unnamed Zambian male character. The Zambian man, we are told, denies his African heritage. When the two meet at Ibadan University she chooses to conscientise him. He discovers her true feelings about herself when she tells him, 'My worry is, I never want to think of myself as an Ibo only. I want to think of myself as an African' (26).

It is from conversations with her that he grows into a man proud of his heritage, despite all his previous protestations. This is a change from the rest of the stories that usually present the Black woman as reactionary and in need of a political awakening, which only a man can bring about. This story establishes therefore a woman's agency as central to *inter alia* psychological liberation, a far cry from the presentation of Black women as outside of the struggle.

Similarly, when Tumelo, a young man, is falsely accused of burning a church down, it is his sister who doubts the police statement and acts upon her convictions. Although Tumelo has been the organiser of the Youth Crusade and in good standing with the community at the time of his death, the congregation believes the police. 'Why, Tumelo My Son?'<sup>26</sup> explores Tolokoho's,



Tumelo's sister's, investigation of the mysterious death of her brother with the help of Tshidi, her friend, in uncovering the truth.

Although the two women face public ridicule in search of the truth, their efforts successfully clear Tumelo's name. This is no salvation for Tumelo's parents, both of whom are in a mental asylum due to the circumstances surrounding their son's death. The congregation in turn, riddled by guilt at having doubted Tumelo, try to overcompensate by being there for the funeral and grow supportive of Tokoloho, the new leader of the youth crusade.

It is because of Tokoloho's determination to clear her brother's name, which she actively sets out to do, that the real criminals are revealed. Tshidi's analytical skills determine the process of the investigation initiated by Tokoloho. The two women refuse to embrace the helplessness which sees Tumelo's parents institutionalised. Instead Tshidi and Tokoloho work together to challenge and change the situation by successfully uncovering the truth, thus altering public opinion in their community.

Nokugcina Sigwili's domestic servant in 'My Dear Madam'<sup>27</sup> refuses all attempts by her madam to control her. Her defiance is highlighted in her refusal to be silenced and ignored. The initially smooth relationship between the two women is complicated by the manner in which the madam chooses to address issues of race and inequality. The madam advises, 'You must forget that you are black and life will not be so difficult ... Maybe the way out is to call [white men] "Baas"' (11).

However, when the 'madam' realises that the 'girl' is not planning to be as co-operative as she had at first envisaged, she takes it upon herself to remind her of something that contradicts her earlier advice,

I am warning you about your behaviour, my girl. You must be very careful about what you are saying, I am telling you. South Africa is not a very lovely country for a black person if you do not learn to be respectful (11).

The 'girl' is therefore left with contradictory and confusing advice. On the one hand, should she

choose to 'forget' her blackness, life becomes easier. On the other hand, however, if she behaves inappropriately for a Black person in apartheid South Africa, her life will be difficult. The madam's ludicrous advice does have a point, although it is not one which she deliberately makes; this is that life under apartheid is difficult for Blacks who 'remember' and those who 'forget' alike. Noting that her advice is unsuccessful, the madam invites a few of her friends to help put her 'girl' in the appropriate place for a Black woman. However, even this plan backfires as the domestic servant forcefully defends her politics, mocking the self-righteousness of her employer and her friends.

Unable to censor herself the 'girl' thinks to herself, 'My tone as I said this was very rude and I regretted it but fortunately, I could not swallow my words' (14).

Unlike the other stories, discussed in this chapter, which mostly use third person narration, the 'girl', as first person narrator, is in charge of the narration although she allows her characters to speak in their own words. The other characters' words are not interpreted through the narrator but speak for themselves. The tone is witty and deliberately sarcastic, pointing perhaps to the cheeky streak in the 'girl' who refuses to be put in her place. Her choice is unambiguous when she realises that she can hold on to either her pride or her job. She refuses to be unseen, unheard and ignored, as the madam's friends continue to speak as if she were not in their midst. When she makes herself heard, she defies those systems which deem her advisors powerful and the 'girl' powerless.

As a working class Black woman she is denied access to power in a white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy. Her employer and her white middle class friends, however, have varying levels of access to that power, and derive it through an effective silencing of those without that access. When the narrator speaks out, she defies those forces which maintain her subjugation by speaking out even as they attempt to silence her.

Another working class Black woman who defies the systems which seek to define her as powerless is Zodwa, the coffee-cart girl<sup>28</sup>. When China, her young male friend, discovers that he is not the only man who buys her presents, he flies into a jealous rage. In an attempt to control her

actions he pulls an okapi knife out on her. This is meant to frighten her into renouncing friendships with all men other than him. However, as soon as Zodwa recovers from the shock of China's actions she says, 'All right, China, maybe you've done this many times before. Go ahead and kill me; I won't cry for help, do what you like with me' (43). China attempts to build a relationship with Zodwa which is based on his power and her helplessness. Because he buys her gifts occasionally, she is to remain loyal to him even if their relationship is not clearly defined. The gifts are a material gesture of control over her behaviour, in the same manner that the okapi is a tool of psychological and physical control.

Zodwa, however, receives the gifts even as she is unwilling to let China control her. Although in buying them, he tries to buy control over her, he fails. When she accepts the gifts, it is in the same manner that she accepts gifts from her other friends. She refuses to be paralysed by his demands on her. This renders him unable to proceed with his act of terror; because in standing her ground, Zodwa invalidates his power. Because his might is based solely on his ability to control and intimidate, Zodwa's refusal to be owned and terrorised incapacitates him.

Mymoena in 'Reward Our Sweat'<sup>29</sup> is a revolutionary Black woman factory worker who refuses to be silenced into complicity with her employers. The story begins as the women factory workers begin to discuss the rent strikes in Cape Town townships. As can be expected in the stories of this period, there is a sell-out character, Ganiet, who passes on information to the bosses. Mymoena, however, will not be intimidated, and speaks her mind regardless of who happens to be listening. The narrative affirms her role and her confidence as it allows her to speak for herself in a language distinctly her own.

Her political commitment is expressed in terms of her position as a Black working class woman who is steadfast in her beliefs and is dedicated enough to her beliefs to accept the consequences that they may give rise to.

Another woman who refuses to be silenced is found in Mtutuzeli Matshoba's 'Three Days

in the Land of the Dying Illusion'<sup>30</sup>. This young woman cannot remain silent as all around her Black women are maligned by migrant worker Black men on a bus returning home. Instead she chooses to challenge the very basis of this attack on those like her.

When one man happily announces, 'I'm going to see my wife, the girl for whom I sacrificed *izinkomo zikabawo*' (18), a younger man argues that the wife has a greater interest in his money than in his arrival. The young man's sentiments are echoed by the older man who then remarks,

*Tyhini! Unyanisile kwedini.* The truth in your words cannot be denied. And to think that I had to leave her to seek work *eRawutini* as soon as we got married. To work for her! Although I scarcely enjoy her companionship (18).

When the first man's tone changes to echo the last speaker, a third man takes the floor. This third man allows his voice to act as a corrective to the sentiments over which the two men are now in consensus. He notes that the wife left at home keeps the family fibre together. He further lauds the Black women's positive role in society while the men are either drinking and/or sleeping with their mistresses at the mines. The wives, he argues, often have to maintain the family even as they are refused the money owed to them by their husbands. This, he maintains, often means that the wives have to make do with nothing to keep the children and the extended family alive.

That the third man is an orator is emphasised by his growing support among the men. A woman smiles her approval as the third man speaks. The younger man, not to be outdone, asserts the fact that the wives themselves take lovers. However, the orator dismisses this since it happens on both sides and especially since the wife is mostly unquestioning about the husband's 'concubines' (19).

Listening to this exchange the nameless young woman cannot 'suppress her views in respect of manhood anymore' (19). She chooses not to recognise the idiom which prescribes that she 'respect'<sup>31</sup> male conversation by remaining outside of it. In spite of this, however, the narrator frames her according to this Black patriarchal respect dichotomy. This technique betrays the narrator's own stance because, unlike her, he does not question the manner in which she is limited

by the 'respect' dichotomy. She openly challenges the very existence and validity of this dichotomy, since she is aware of the restrictions that it burdens her with. She is interested to know what the men expect their children to eat if their food is not to come from the money sent home, and whether they would rather the wives withheld the money and allowed the children to die of starvation. She is also interchangeably amused and saddened by the established social contradictions which encourage men to be proud of their status as fathers on the one hand, without any accompanying obligation to fulfil parental responsibilities on the other.

The men respond by attempting to silence her as a woman who chooses to intrude on a 'private' men's conversation. This is followed by accusations levelled at her as being party to the system which oppresses Black men; laying responsibility on her for the loss of the pre-colonial way of life. She is therefore blamed for the position of forced migrancy in which these men find themselves. These accusations are accompanied by claims to the helplessness of the position of Black men:

You use your birthgiving nature to make us slave for you, and when we give you the little that we sweat blood for, still you're not satisfied. You call us failures as if *ilizwe* was governed by us and not the white man (19).

The narrator questions this, but then proceeds to enter into a diatribe which pledges his support for the opinions expressed by the men in this scene<sup>32</sup>. When the vocal young woman is once again confronted with accusations of her 'intrusion' into a man's conversation, she retorts,

Your father could ask your mother such a question. So could my father, my mother. But I am a woman *wesimanje-manje* (of this time). You can't ask *me* such a question (19)<sup>33</sup>.

Responding, in turn, to the accusation that it is because of women that the nation is in a state of slavery, she asks,

Where were the men when the land and cattle were lost? Something closer to our present reality: is it not your own so-called chiefs, men mind you, who have destroyed our very last subsistence by accepting *lo Zimelegeqe wemu* (this independence of yours) which removed even the faintest hope of developing the land (20)?

The courage of her attack is demonstrated by their silence in response to her question. The men cannot respond because of the fear that they have of the system of chieftaincy in place with the accompanying Homeland system it props up. That she chooses to attack them on the unspeakable further demonstrates her courage and their cowardice. It also reinforces her choice not to be silenced, either as a *Black woman* in 'men's conversations' or as a *Black* woman in relation to the operations of apartheid<sup>34</sup>. Since (by their own admission) courage is the domain of men, she inverts the system which validates this by proving them cowardly; while she -- 'despite' being a woman -- is the brave one. That she has the last word in the polemic is further indicative of the power and effect of her dare. Although it is the narrator who has the last word it is not one she is allowed to hear. The narrator's last word evaluates what she has said because even he has not taken part in the conversation. She has successfully inverted the myths about the women that are forced to stay at home while the husbands go in search of work in the urban areas, even though, unmarried, she is not one of these women.

She takes it upon herself to speak out against a distortion of their position to that of villain, and a glorification of the Black men's position as the ultimate victim and suffering subject. By doing this, she points to the suffering and the difficulties that the wives of migrant labourers have to deal with and encounter. She places their suffering in context and puts the blame for political complacency as much on the shoulders of Black men as they attempt to put in on the shoulders of Black women. She challenges the irony in their position of privilege as the ultimate victims by pointing to the manner in which they themselves are complicit in the suffering and oppression of Black women<sup>35</sup>.

The three stories which are analysed next reflect a defiance of a different kind. These are women who attempt to forge a positive life despite the negativity which surrounds them as Black people living under apartheid.

Miriam Tlali's 'The Haunting Melancholy of Klipvoordam'<sup>36</sup> is a beautifully told story about friends who take time off from the drudgery of Soweto to holiday in Bophuthatswana, because it is the nearest and only place that Black people are allowed to use camping facilities.

The ability to escape the township in this manner is clearly constructed as a rare pleasure. Masoli, the narrator observes,

All of my life I had yearned to go for a holiday at the coast; anywhere away from the hustle and bustle of the city, but I could never afford it. How many of us are so fortunate in Soweto anyway (14).

Seeing her daughter in a swimming suit swimming in the dam brings rise to mixed feelings in Masoli. She has never owned a swimming suit. Thinking about how the rest of Soweto is spending their New Year's Day, she says,

Busloads, truckloads, hooting cars adorned with colourful ribbons, carrying hundreds of eager men and women (mostly teenagers) dancing to the rhythm of thunderous portable radios, stereos and tape-recorders. These would be speeding through the grey townships anywhere -- all corners, nooks and crevices; to any 'available', 'permitted' or 'open' picnic spots -- where blackness may be 'allowed' to relax for the day. These would be somewhere well out of the way of the 'whites only' reserved luxury spots of course: something like 'our' Klipvoordam ... out of *their* line of vision (15; Emphasis in original).

Here in this out-of-the-way place, they can feel like people and be able to appreciate nature and listen to music and toast the New Year. Masoli, her daughter and her friends are used to present an alternative picture to Black family life than has been presented thus far. Here the mother and daughter are able to get away from the suffering, albeit temporarily. This story presents the figure of several Black women as happily on holiday. The story is a far cry from the stories which pretend that Black women have lives of constant turmoil and pain. Instead, it shows that not all Black life is about suffering, that Black women (even in apartheid South Africa) are not only helpless victims. The story does not attempt to obscure apartheid. Indeed, Masoli refers to it directly. However, even as she mentions the difficulty with which people in Soweto enjoy the festive season, she emphasises the fact that they find ways to celebrate. The story celebrates the multi-dimensional

aspects of Black community life by alluding to the resilience which allows people to occasionally enjoy themselves (albeit with restrictions).

In another story, Anil's<sup>37</sup> mother wakes him up every Saturday so that they may go to the market to shop. She loves this routine as much as he hates it. That it is a whole day affair increases the boy, Anil's, annoyance since he is unable to play with his friends, or sleep late. The mother (on the other hand) is sensitive to his needs as much as is possible, given the necessity of buying food. She knows when he is tired, hungry or angry without his saying so. He does realise that the market is vibrant, peopled by lively exchange between the predominantly Indian customers and traders. However, it is dying out as a custom of shopping, and perhaps the mother wants to complete his introduction to this tradition before it is entirely lost.

When a journalist takes a picture of Anil, and enquires about Anil's feelings about the market, the boy surprises himself. That he claims to like it when he does not shows that he does understand what his mother is trying to do, and that he chooses to be loyal to her. Anil resents escorting his mother to the market place: yet when he answers the journalist, he claims to derive some pleasure from the experience. Perhaps this is due to an understanding of what his mother is trying to do by forcing him to accompany her. The relationship between mother and son explored in previous chapters is inverted here. Anil's mother does not live her life according to his needs. Instead, she decides on what he is to do. Similarly, Anil sides with his mother even as he resents these morning trips to the market. It is not the mother (as in the stories analysed earlier) who is forced to support her son. Instead, she does what she sees as appropriate for her. Anil, in turn, chooses to support his mother by lying to the journalist.

Njabulo Ndebele's 'The Prophetess'<sup>38</sup> is as remarkable for its story as it is for its message. It is about a sick woman, a nurse, who sends her son to the prophetess for holy water. Although trained in healing by profession, the nurse trusts in the prophetess' ability to heal in ways that 'conventional' medicine cannot. The prophetess in return tells the young boy, 'Your mother has a



heart of gold [...] You are very fortunate indeed to have such a parent' (4).

This story also portrays the only incidence of a positive relationship between two Black women, unrelated by birth. It is a relationship of trust and mutual respect even as the ways in which the two women live differ. That the women are both healers is also significant in that the story can be read to deliver commentary on the practice itself. They both recognise that their respective traditions, far from being mutually exclusive, can be complementary. Even those trained in medical science experience necessity which cannot be attended to by their calling.

When the little boy accidentally breaks the bottle spilling the holy water, he replaces it with ordinary tap water. That the mother begins to feel better nonetheless is perhaps an affirmation of her faith in the prophetess' ability to heal her, carried not in the physical presence of the water but perhaps in the symbolism that is inherent in it. That his mother recovers in spite of ordinary water also delivers commentary on the manner in which the prophetess' power works. After all, had he spilled medicine and replaced it with water, the body would not have healed. That his mother recovers bears testimony to the importance of faith in the healing powers of the prophetess.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored a range of responses by women characters which negate the passivity of the earlier chapters. The women in this final chapter are equipped with the choice to act in ways that benefit them. Even when the consequences are less than ideal, however, the actions themselves are not regretted. That these stories form part of the shortest chapter in the analyses however is telling. Powerful as they are, these defiant women characters form the minority of female characters in *Staffrider* 1978-1982. It is encouraging that many of them take shape in the hands of male writers, although they sometimes occur side by side with less revolutionary stories by the same writers.

<sup>12</sup> Masoli relates, 'The girl next to me shivered, cupping her ears with her hands, and hid her face on my lap' (13). Later in the presence of the police, Masoli uses her body to protect the girl. She tells it thus: 'I rested my tired abdomen over the body of the child below me and could only hope that she would not suffocate to death' (13). Masoli also tells of the girl-child diving towards her [Masoli's] groin for protection.

<sup>13</sup> Xolile Thabo Mavuso's (1978) story published in *Staffrider* 1.4: 47-48.

<sup>14</sup> It is with great reservation and unease that I use the word 'tribal' here. This is largely because of the ideological baggage, which accompanies it. However, given that this is the only word in the English language which refers to the divisions along language lines among indigenous groups in South Africa, I am forced to use it here. Another word 'ethnic' closely resembles the intended meaning, but has the same kind of racist ideological baggage I wish to distance myself from. Thandeka's father resents Shikhetho particularly because he is Shangaan. That he is of a darker hue is tied to and additional to this fact. Venturing into whether the 'dislike/labeling/ridicule/stereotyping' of Shangaans by some members of other South African 'tribes'/'ethnic groups' is because they are 'usually' darker, or whether this has become an additional factor (due to historical-political situation) seems pointless explore at this stage for the purposes of this thesis. Let it suffice to say that in drawing attention to this dimension, the author is aware that a Black audience will recognise this dynamic of Black South African life specifically (in so far as the Shangaan issue specifically) or Black life more generally (in relation to the specific commentary on self-hate). The author is here deliberately drawing attention to the prejudices which exist against Black people of a darker hue even in Black communities. He is also aware of the association which will be made by Black South African audiences between very dark skins and being Shangaan. He does not need to explicitly draw the point out here because Black audiences will know what he is talking about, and these are the readers he addresses himself to.

<sup>15</sup> See previous endnote.

<sup>16</sup> 'Jobman' by Achmat Danghor (1981) in *Staffrider* 4.1:20-22 and 26-28.

<sup>17</sup> Other characters in the story constantly refer to him as '[t]he bleddie dommie' (20-1).

<sup>18</sup> Jobman is seen by the other characters as mad because he takes chances which other labourers dare not. He chooses to act, as he wants, without consulting the white farmer. That he constantly positions himself outside of the white farmer's control is dangerous if you fear the farmer. The other labourers therefore respond to Jobman's defiance as 'madness' and 'stupidity' almost interchangeably. Because he does not talk and his intentions are not communicated to the rest of them, the labourers are convinced of the rectitude of their position. His madness is therefore merely his choice to behave differently from the rest, a choice he shares with Anna.

<sup>19</sup> Gladys Thomas' (1981) story published in *Staffrider* 4.2: 23-4.

<sup>20</sup> In my essay 'Black Women's Lives and The Production of Knowledge: Setting the Record Straight on Womanist Issues'. Unpublished Paper.

<sup>21</sup> See my 'Reconsidering Motherhood in the Autobiographies of Ellen Kuzwayo and Emma Mashinini', *Inter Action* 4 (1996): 48.

<sup>22</sup> Granted, bell hooks is an African-American academic and is therefore more familiar with the situation in the US. However, some Black South African women and Black women from elsewhere on the continent have challenged the representation of Black motherhood in feminism.

<sup>23</sup> In slavery family members could be sold off individually and slave marriages were not recognised. When one looks at the migrant labour system, one finds that, Black men went to work in the cities while the women and children remained at home in the rural areas. Even middle class Black families were not safe since detentions, exile, etc. plagued all social levels of Black Southern African life. It

is therefore necessary when theorising families to be always alert to the racial markers on the institution and the relevance of these in different politico-historical circumstances.

<sup>24</sup> Mothobi Mutloatse's (1978) story subtitled 'Notes Toward a Film Script', *Staffrider* 1.4: 49.

<sup>25</sup> Sy Moya's (1981) story in *Staffrider* 4.3: 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> A story by Mandla Sibeko (1979) published in *Staffrider* 2.1: 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Staffrider* 3.4: 11-12 and 14.

<sup>28</sup> 'The Coffee-Cart Girl' by Es'kia Mphahlele (1981) published in *Staffrider* 4.2: 42-3.

<sup>29</sup> Leonard Koza's (1982) story published in *Staffrider* 4.4: 42-44.

<sup>30</sup> A story published in *Staffrider* 2.3: 17-20.

<sup>31</sup> 'Respect' is problematised here because even though she it is called such by the narrator and later by characters in the story, it entails the woman in question bowing down to male authority. She is to be invited into the conversation and may not enter of her own free will. The same does not hold of female conversation and a man may enter into it as he wishes.

<sup>32</sup> He calls for a woman who is different, 'Fock! I'm also not getting married until I come across a sister who does not conform to that base expectation' (19).

<sup>33</sup> It is worth mentioning at this stage that the narrator seems to have changed his mind, or is at least giving her a hearing. He begins as if he is against her but justifies his resolve thus, 'we need to mobilize in time to defend our divine right to make war and reduce everything to rubble' (20).

<sup>34</sup> This is not a superficial separation which aims to feed into tendencies to divide Black female subjects into the categories of 'Blackness' and 'womanness'. Instead, her silence signifies her position as different from all Black men (who may partake in men's conversations) but similar to Black men in the expected silence around apartheid.

<sup>35</sup> It appears that the right to claim ultimate victim status is at the core of the accusations leveled against poor Black women. These Black men refuse to acknowledge that they contribute to the subjugation of Black women, even though racism and capitalism also oppress them. Ironically therefore in denying the suffering of Black women, these Black men claim and reserve the 'privileged' position to inhabit the space of the ultimate victims. I am indebted to Kimberley A. Yates for this insight.

<sup>36</sup> *Staffrider* 4.1: 13-16.

<sup>37</sup> A character from Jayapraga Reddy's (1982) 'Market Days', *Staffrider* 5.1: 8-10.

<sup>38</sup> *Staffrider* 5.1: 2-7.

## Conclusion

The preceding chapters have explored representations of Black women characters in the first five years of *Staffrider*. The analysis has been confined to short stories written in English published in the magazine between 1978 and 1982. It has become apparent that there are both limited and complex portrayals of women, although the former is by far the more prevalent. The majority of the stories studied here are by Black writers influenced by Black Consciousness ideals. Very few of the stories analysed in this study fall outside of this category. It is interesting to note that trends evident in explicitly BC stories are echoed in stories outside of this mould. It has become possible therefore to chart developments and trends in portrayal of Black women characters in *Staffrider* which span both BC and non-BC material alike. The analysis indicates that Black Consciousness literature echoes the sexist bias which characterised BC discourse. Often the experiences of Black men are interpreted as the definitive Black experience. This often translates into a direct exclusion of Black female experiences or the relegation of these to supplementary status.

BC activists and artists habitually called for an art with relevance. It was repeatedly argued that 'art for art's sake' was a luxury Black writers could ill afford. Instead, artists were to show commitment to the cause of liberation by dedicating their art to educating the audience to the ideals of BC. The reading audience was exposed to a variety of characters usually ranging from reactionary 'non-whites' to Black activists. Audiences were to emulate and learn from the actions and lives of the characters. In this way, it was argued that BC art would ultimately draw the general Black public closer to embracing the ideals of Black Consciousness. Entertainment was additional and far from being a priority.

Writing relevant art meant that the didactic function was often made explicit by the authors. There were clear lessons to be learnt from the stories. The narrators often provided commentary on the state of affairs presented to the reader, suggesting ways of seeing and interpreting events and

actions. The audience was aware of the didactic function and aim of relevant art as they themselves shared in the narratorial moment. Through various narratorial techniques the authors guided the audience towards what was deemed as appropriate behaviour. 'Non-white' characters are clearly the villains in much of BC writing because active resistance to apartheid was encouraged. This encouragement is explicit in the manner in which it is rewarded. For instance, those characters (usually including the narrator) that were BC activists were portrayed in a positive light. 'Non-white' characters, on the other hand, were the villains in BC stories. This literature propagated ideas about 'appropriate Black behaviour.' Ironically, this active commitment to fighting racism is often (as has been repeatedly shown in this study) reserved for Black men. Black female activists are few and far between.

Since BC art is supposed to reflect society and influence action, the paucity of female activist characters is cause for concern. The writers appear to be denying or downplaying the role and contributions of female activists to the struggle for national liberation. Since there has been evidence of female activist at all levels of political resistance in South Africa, this literature does not reflect the reality of the society around the authors. Activism is reserved for Black men and those (Black men) in the target audience have many characters to emulate. It appears that female members of the audience, however, are guided towards separate types of action. This is where the double standards of both the doctrine and the literature surface most emphatically. 'Good' Black women characters are deemed by writers to be those who support male activists against all odds. There is no place for them to be activists themselves. Support, loyalty and controlled sexuality are the only characteristics lauded in the stories examined. There are a few notable exceptions in the final chapter. In the main, the literature argues that women contribute to the national struggle through their loyalty and support. It is this endurance which allows the men, whether they are husbands or sons, to leave home to liberate the country. Leaving home to liberate the country includes engaging in public political activity, leaving the country into exile and/or joining the

liberation forces. The men (in their lives) need for the mothers and wives to be a constant source of support. This exclusion of women from the public and active realm of political activism means that women are left to watch the struggle from the sidelines. Their lives are inevitably affected by what happens to these men, but the political action affects their lives only at a personal level. It is often because a loved one is dead or detained that these women suffer. Few consider the relevance of the man's action, or the manner in which the apartheid system works. Often women are portrayed as incapable of understanding the politics of the day or intimidated by the action around them.

MaShezi in 'The Day A Leader Died' is one example of this phenomenon. When she is driven to political action, it is because of how it affects her son. Her decision to join and partake in the stay-away is not motivated by her own political convictions at all. Instead it stems from her loyalty to her son who is a leader of the group that suggested the boycott in the first place. Although she does not completely understand the matters discussed in her own house, the men who sit and plan politics with her son intimidate her. She feels excluded from discussions of politics and political action even as these are discussed in her own space.

S'bongile in Miriam Tlali's 'Point of No Return' is in a similar predicament. While her husband plans an attack on the apartheid State, she is told to stay at home. Because she is a 'good' Black woman, she is satisfied when he defines her role as confined to motivating young Black men to join the struggle and bringing up their child. She is not to know what the plan is because she too is not allowed to access any information on real political action.

These are simply two out of many examples of female characters examined in Chapter 2. That this is a repeated motif betrays some of the intentions and beliefs of the authors of these stories. Even as the writers saw around them evidence of female activism, the appropriate place for Black women is still defined as that of support. This is a motif which permeated the writing of male and female writers, BC and non-BC, alike. The manner in which Black women are to support Black men is not confined to the one explored above however. Black women characters are

expected to help restore Black masculinity, which is seen as threatened by white power. There is no consideration of how Black masculinity affects Black women. Because Black masculinity is interpreted simply as equivalent to Black pride, it is inconceivable in these stories that this masculinity may adversely affect Black women. Since Black women are never portrayed with wounded pride, they are expected to help heal what appears to be a vulnerable and fragile Black male pride.

In the story 'To Kill A Man's Pride', for instance, the Black women need to feign ignorance of the humiliation suffered by Black men at the hands of a white male doctor. White women (called ladies) share with white men in the humiliation of Black men. Consequently then, the Black women characters look away pretending not to be aware of the process as it unfolds under their eyes. The Black male narrator in this story is appreciative of this and acknowledges that it goes a considerable way towards restoring his stripped pride. The Black women here are placed in a position where they have to re-masculate Black men in the face of racism.

Given this trend, it is particularly disturbing therefore to see the discrepancy in the manner in which Black women (activists) are treated by Black men. In Mtutuzeli Matshoba's stories the sight of suffering Black women is described as despicable and nauseating on several occasions. It is a consistent thread, which runs through most of this author's stories published in *Staffrider*. While Matshoba's narrators repeatedly appeal to reader sympathy when a Black man suffers racism, Black women are the objects of scorn and disregard. At times, Matshoba's narrators argue that Black women collude with white men to oppress Black men. This accusation is never supported, merely repeated as if it were an obviously true fact.

Lesetja in 'Poet in Love' embraces BC and is presented to a large extent with the narrator's sympathy. He is the most contradictory male character presented in these stories. Although he embraces BC, he becomes a recluse because he does not approve of the community around him after his conversion. This is contradictory given the manner in which poets (in their capacity as

artists) should ideally behave according to BC. He does not educate the community to the ideology as would be expected, but decidedly shuns it instead. He rejects his girlfriend, Tilly and all other Black women (with the exception of Mokgadi) because they hinder psychological liberation. Similar to Matshoba's Black women, Lesetja's former lovers 'enslave Black minds', as if their minds are not Black. Despite all of this, he has the narrator's sympathy and support. The manner in which he treats his new partner, Mokgadi who has also embraced BC, leaves much to be desired. She is not found attractive of herself. It is because society has labelled her ugly, that Lesetja is attracted to her. Her ability to think is constantly undermined even though they first meet at a decidedly intellectual gathering.

Although Black women are expected to offer unconditional support to Black men in their politics and ease their suffering, Black men in the stories are not required to reciprocate this. Even in the two events where a complex image of a Black woman activist appears, Black men are not supportive. Mymoena, the radical activist in 'Reward Our Sweat' is faced with the direct hostility of a Black male colleague. He clearly is a 'non-white' character.

Similarly in 'Lomthwalo' the activist has no support at all. The only possible source of support for her is her activist mother, currently in detention. Instead, she is to pull herself up without a community to provide support. In fact, the entire Chapter 4 which documents complex images of Black women in this literature shows that these women often have to demonstrate their strength of character by going against the wills of the Black male characters in their lives.

Consistently therefore this literature, on the one hand, encourages Black men to embrace activism and to rely unconditionally on the support of Black women. These men may behave in any way desired by themselves in so far as their sexuality is concerned. On the other hand, there are different codes of behaviour for Black women in the literature examined here. Appropriate conduct for Black women is to be sympathetic to male action, sexually limited and passive. When they



choose to deviate from these areas, they are repeatedly and brutally inscribed violently by the narrators and authors of the stories studied. Black women activists are not rewarded in the manner that Black males are in their positions as activists. That the chapter which examines and analyses 'positive' images of Black women in this literature is by far the shortest chapter in this study bears testimony to the problem of representation which presents itself in this literature.

If Black men need Black women's support for their action, what does it mean that Black women are denied this same support? Does it mean that they do not need the support because they are able to resist without it? This is another instance of unrealistic expectations of Black women. It is a similar unrealistic expectation which, in the mother Africa trope, dubs suffering silently a measure of strength and virtue. It also privileges male activism over female activism suggesting as it does that the latter is not as important as the former and does not warrant the attention from the community which the former does.

When Black male characters confront racism here, it is usually in the hands of white men. This is a situation, which sees the Black male character emerge as the one to be emulated in most of the stories. When Black women encounter oppression it is often in their contact with white men and women. When the encounter is with a white man, that the woman in question is violated is usually blamed on her. Of particular importance is the way in which all encounters between Black women and white men in the stories examined (with only one exception) are characterised by sexual violation.

The portrayal of relationships between Black women and white men draws attention to several other problems with the literature at hand. Firstly, that all oppressive situations between white men and Black women are of a 'sexualised' nature implies that this is the only manner in which white men act oppressively towards Black women. Secondly, it denies the Black women characters agency by confining them to the position of helpless but deserving victims. In addition to

this, while Black men are often portrayed as the characters to emulate in their relationships (and/or contact) with white men, Black women are never portrayed positively in relation to white men. This means that Black women characters are to blame for their treatment by white men, while white men are to blame for the manner in which they treat Black men. Since neither violation by white men nor that by Black men is condemned in these stories, it is always the Black woman character's fault.

The theme of violence inflicted on Black women is a recurrent one throughout the literature and it is one which escapes any criticism by the authors and their narrators. Restrictions on women's bodies are enforced with the continuous threat of violence. These stories make this quite clear. That this is part of the social aim of the writing itself, that of educating Black readers about appropriate BC approved behaviour, is certain. Regulated and restricted, the Black women characters remain for the most part silent, voiceless and often nameless. When they are given names, these usually denote affection or imply support. In these cases the Black women are named in relation to the men they attached to. Their names describe/define their relationships with men. Black men's names, in these stories, however reveal something about their own characters and personalities. Often Black women characters have meaningless names. At other times they are only provided with nicknames. In contrast, the men's names usually denote action.

Because of the importance of this literature politically and socially, the implications and importance of these portrayals cannot be underestimated. Clearly there are separate codes of conduct deemed appropriate for Black men and Black women. This is the case regardless of the setting. Sexuality and its manifestations are treated differently depending on whether the writer is presenting a male or female character. Male characters commit adultery and abuse trust vested in them, threaten violence with weapons and yet, despite this, manage to almost always retain narratorial sympathy. Women characters are raped or humiliated in public by many BC writers'

pens for their transgressions. They receive physical and emotional abuse both from their partners and fathers, on the rare occasions where the latter is depicted in these stories.

Ultimately it appears that for the most part, women characters are culpable for all the activity in the stories. The responsibility for the behaviour of others almost always rests on their shoulders. If men choose to venture into politics, the women suffer and receive abuse from State officials. When men violate them, it is still the women who are to blame because they have transgressed some other social rule for appropriate female behaviour, usually by consuming alcohol. When they venture into prostitution, the conditions which force them into these situations are deemed irrelevant even as they are noted, because somehow the ability to contemplate the act is in itself deemed immoral. Such moralistic undertones are selective and it is only women characters that are subjected to them.

The women characters in the final chapter differ from those in Chapters 2 and 3 significantly. Although they also tend to be without support, they nonetheless manage to remain committed to their own ideals. Their voices and thoughts are communicated unambiguously. When Tumelo dies in 'Why Tumelo My Son', Tshidi and Tokoloho take on public opinion in the story and change its course. They decide to clear him of the lies surrounding his name despite what the community believes. When the truth is successfully uncovered in the end, it is solely due to their efforts towards this end. Public opinion in the story is greatly affected and changed by the actions of these two young Black female characters.

Similarly, when the narrator in 'My Dear Madam' is continuously insulted and patronised by her employer and her friends, she decides that the job is not worth her pride as a Black person and decides to leave. Although she is to be without employment as a result of her action, she does not waver in her conviction. She refuses to allow her liberal white employer to control her and dehumanise her. Because the manner in which her Madam views the narrator's oppression is

distorted, the narrator leaves. After all, in the home of the Madam, her employer's is always the position of power. Refusing to stay translates into a refusal to acknowledge and bow down to that power by the Black woman narrator.

When China threatens Zodwa in 'The Coffee-Cart Girl', she challenges him to kill her because submission is not a real option for her. Similarly, the woman in Matshoba's 'Three Days in The Land Of The Dying Illusion' challenges what the men on the bus have to say about rural women. In doing so she subtly and later explicitly challenges the social rules which determine when she may speak. By speaking and 'intruding' on a 'men's conversation', she rejects the institutions which attempt to silence her. She openly challenges all that the men take for granted. She will not be quiet even when there are repeated attempts to silence her. Because she does not recognise the validity or authority of these, she need not honour them. In her challenge to the men to speak on a subject deemed taboo in male conversation, she emphasises the manner in which she is subject to neither their control nor the limitations they place themselves under. Matshoba's male narrator later intervenes and attempts to downplay her role in the narrative. Even as the narrator assumes a corrective and patronising stance towards the woman, however, the impact of her words remains.

It is clear that Mymoena in 'Reward Our Sweat' will not be silenced either because she speaks even as she knows Ganiet, the informer, is listening. Mymoena speaks her mind and allows him to hear despite the danger this holds for her safety. She cannot remain silent because to do so would allow him and the employers power over her mind. Instead she chooses loyalty to herself. Like Zodwa, she braves hostility and remains true to herself. Ganiet may repeat her statements in defiance of apartheid law and Mymoena could be detained for it. Zodwa challenges China to do what he wants. In so doing she risks death or mutilation, but she knows that there is no real escape from him otherwise. If he is to harm her, he cannot do it with her permission. She realises that if she submits to his will then she is not free to do as she wishes and is as good as dead.

The manner in which Black women are repeatedly characterised in this literature is cause for concern. This is partly because of the effect this literature could have had on Black women's images of themselves. After all, if the circulation of *Staffrider* was as high as some argue and one copy was often read by many people, then this literature was accessible to a significant population of urban Black South Africans. Since the stated objective (by BC artists) of much of the literature is largely for modelling behaviour, these images were portrayed to be emulated. BC literature claimed to portray positive images, or in Gwala's words mentioned earlier, 'fully-fledged' representations of Black people.

It is clear from this study that much of the emphasis was on providing 'positive' images of Black men. Even this has problems however, when some of the male characters who enjoy narratorial sympathy are wife-beaters and abusers of women. It appears that as far as these writers are concerned, in the main, the love of Blackness translates only into a love for and loyalty to Black men. Blackness is repeatedly conceptualised as Blackmaleness. It is their suffering which is tragic and which spurs positive action. It is Black men who, in the main, change matters. Black women characters suffer silently and repeatedly, to prove their imaginary strength. When they act in ways which are not in accordance with what is deemed appropriate in Black patriarchy, they are inscribed violently. In addition to the actual 'punishment' which they constantly have to endure for the slightest transgressions, they have to continuously shoulder the blame for the punishment because somehow they are portrayed as deserving it their violation. The consumption of alcohol always results in the rape of the woman character concerned. This encourages myths around rape in a literature which is supposed to be progressive and liberating. It is clear then that this liberation is not intended to be rewarding to Black women for how could a literature which glorifies the abuse of women characters and enacts the shackling of female characters be liberating to Black women readers?

There are no similar penalties for drinking men. In fact, there are no penalties for Black and white men at all. Even the 'non-white' characters receive better treatment in the hands of authors. That Black women, regardless of their politics are repeatedly (with the exception of the stories analysed in Chapter 4) treated in a manner that is more hostile than 'non-white' characters has severe implications for the manner in which Black women were seen in BC communities. Writers verbalise and reflect on the manner in which their communities think; they are products of their societies. In BC literature writers aim to influence their societies as well. Several articles, poems and Joseph Letsoalo's story analysed in chapter 3 explicitly discuss the role of *Staffrider* in monitoring and influencing Black behaviour.

The characters in chapter 4 are not noticeable only because they are well rounded, which is a welcome change from the stereotypical characters in Chapter 2 and 3, but also due to their ability to endure challenges successfully. These characters are usually presented in extremely trying conditions -- threatened with physical and emotional violence, evicted from their homes, informed on by Black men, maligned by other Black characters and so on. They confront these challenges head on continuously and successfully. Often they refuse to be silent, unlike the earlier women characters. Their decision to speak means they either tell their own stories or are allowed a significant voice (by the writers) in the narrative.

Having analysed this literature, it is not only the absence of any gender sympathy with women that is striking, even as there is dialogue in the magazine about Black women and writing. It is ironic too that a body of literature influenced by an ideology which held the potential to dismantle oppression itself repeats so many oppressive situations. The same is true of BC literature, a literature that is to encourage liberation for all Black people. The practice of excluding women's experiences from 'positive' Black experience in BC literature duplicates and fortifies institutional forms which serve to marginalise women in both Black and white societies. It is encouraging to see

that 'fully-fledged' representations (when they do begin to emerge) are from male and female writers alike. However, that they feature side by side with the negative images of both Black men (because a Black man who is abusive is not realistically a 'positive' figure either) and Black women means that perhaps by the end of the period covered this was not necessarily a trend towards truly elaborate images of Black people in literature. Had *Staffrider* writers been moving towards portraying Black (women) characters more positively, there would have been a higher rate of sensitive portrayal towards the end of the period studied. However, the appearance of stories which portray female characters elaborately is sporadic and present throughout the period covered. Perhaps the sporadic appearance of these coupled with an explicit discussion of gender, marked the beginning of a more critical thinking on the gender implications by the authors of literature produced by Black writers in South Africa. There appears to be little point in criticising white writers for stereotypical images of Black people in their literature only to create new kinds of stereotypes afresh.

This is not to completely undermine the creative impact of BC literature, nor is it a stroke of the pen which dismisses its importance. It is, however, important to highlight the positive along with the negative aspects of literature influenced by a liberation movement/ideology. With the growth in progressive gender analyses of South African literature and the increased emphasis on gender as a political issue, it is hoped that political writing will soon no longer perpetuate a hierarchy of oppressions in its notion of a liberated society.

## Bibliography

- a' Motana, Nape. 1980. 'Poet in Love', *Staffrider* 3.1: 14-15.
- Abrahams, Cecil. 1988. 'The South African Writer in a Changing Society', *Matatu* 2.3-4: 32-47.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1978. *Morning Yet On Creation Day*. London: Heinemann.
- Afzal-Khan, Fawzia. 1996. 'Bridging the Gap Between So-Called Postcolonial and Minority Women of Color: A Comparative Methodology For Third World Feminist Literary Criticism', *Womanist Theory and Research: A Journal of Womanist and Feminist-Of-Color Scholarship and Art*. 2.1: 35-47.
- Aiyer, Narain. 1978. 'The Casbar', *Staffrider* 1.4: 35-36.
- Alexander, Neville. 1991. 'Black Consciousness: A Reactionary Tendency?', in N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson. (eds). *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*. Claremont: David Philip.
- Arnold, Millard (ed). 1979. *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa*. New York: Vintage.
- Atmore, Anthony and Nancy Westlake. 1972. 'A Liberal Dilemma: A Critique of the Oxford History of South Africa', *Race*. 14.2: 106-136.
- Baker-Fletcher, Karen. 1995. 'Womanism, Afrocentricism, and the Reconstruction of Black Womanhood', in Jacquelyn Grant. (ed). *Perspective on Womanist Theology*. Atlanta: ITC.
- Bengu, Sibusiso M. E. 1975. *Chasing Gods Not Our Own*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.
- Bernstein, Hilda. 1987. *No. 46: Steve Biko*. London: International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa.
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. 1993. 'Talking Racism and the Editing of Women's Studies', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson. (eds) *Introducing Women's Studies*. London: MacMillan.
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum and Margaret Coulson. 1986. 'Transforming Socialist Feminism: The Challenge of Racism', *Feminist Review*. 23 Summer: 81-92.
- Biko, Steve. 1987. *I Write What I Like*. London: Borwedeane.
- Black Review* 1972.
- Boff, Leonardo. 1990. 'Theology of Liberation: The Faithful Grant Liberating Power to the Faith', in L. T. Sargent. (ed). *Contemporary Political Ideology: A Reader*. California: Brooks/Cole.
- Boitumelo. 1979a. 'Here I Stand', *Staffrider*. 2.4: 60.
- . 1978. 'When I die', *Staffrider*. 1.3: 49.



---. 1979b. 'Women Writers Speak', *Staffrider*. 2.4: 60-61.

Brown, Susan; Isabel Hofmeyr and Susan Rosenberg (eds). 1983. 'Introduction', *LIP: From Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan.

Budlender, Geoff. 1991. 'Black Consciousness and the Liberal Tradition: Then and Now', in N. Barney Pitsoana, and Mamphela Ramphele et al. (eds). *op cit.*

Burnett, June. 1989. 'A Letter From The Treadmill', in June Burnett, Julie Cotterill, Annette Kennerly, Phoebe Nathan and Jeanne Wilding (eds). *The Common Thread: Writings By Working-Class Women*. London: Mandarin.

Burnett, June; Julie Cotterill; Annette Kennerly; Phoebe Nathan and Jeanne Wilding (eds). 1989. *The Common Thread: Writings By Working-Class Women*. London: Mandarin.

Buthelezi, L. B. Z. 1978. 'Ngikusongele', *Staffrider*. 1.1: 56.

Buthelezi, Sipho. 1991. 'The Emergence of Black Consciousness: An Historical Appraisal', in N. Barney Pitsoana and Mamphela Ramphele et al. (eds). *op cit.*

---. (ed). 1995. *South Africa: The Dynamics and Prospects of Transformation (1900-1994)*. Harare: SAPES.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York & London: Routledge.

Bynum, Victoria E. 1992. *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the South*. Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press.

Cameron, D. (ed). 1992. *The Feminist Critique of Language*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cameron, Deborah. 1994. 'Not gender difference but the difference gender makes', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*: 13-26.

Caute, David. 1970. *Fanon*. London: Fontana.

Charney, Craig. 1993. 'Black Power, White Press; Literacy, Newspapers and the Transformation of Township Political Culture.' Paper Presented at African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 10th May.

---. 1991. 'Challenging the Chatelist State: the Black Consciousness Movement and the Media', Paper Presented at the 22nd Annual ASSA (Association for Sociology of South Africa) Conference held at the University of Cape Town from the 30 June -03 July.

Chapman, M. (ed). 1982. 'Interview with Mongane Serote', *Soweto Poetry*. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill.

- Chapole, S. 1983. 'On Critical Procedures in Reading African Literature', *Contrast* 14.4: 21-25.
- Chay, Barbara. 1993. 'Rereading Barbara Smith: Black Feminist Criticism and the Category of Experience', *New Literary History* 24: 635-652.
- Clarke, Cheryl, Jewell L. Gomez, Evelyn Hammonds, Bonnie Johnson and Linda Powell. 1983. 'Conversations and Questions: Black Women and Black Women Writers', *Conditions: Nine* 3.3: 88-137.
- Cleage, Pearl. 1990. *Mad At Miles: A Black Woman's Guide To Truth*. Michigan: Pearl Cleage Group.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Cambridge: Unwin Hyman.
- Couzens, Tim and Gray, Stephen (eds). 1988. *Research in African Literatures* 19.1 (Special Edition on Black South African Literature since 1976).
- Current Writing* 2 1990.
- Danghor, Achmat. 1981. 'Jobman', *Staffrider* 4.1: 20-22 and 26-28.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. 1987. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women in the English Middle-Class, 1780 - 1850*. London: Hutchinson.
- Davis, Angela Y. 1990. *Women, Culture and Politics*. London: Women's Press.
- de Vries, Abraham. 1989. 'Interview with Richard Rive', *Current Writing* 1.
- Diaz-Diocaretz, Myriam. 1989. 'Sieving the Matriheritage of the Sociotext', in Elizabeth Meese and Alice Parker (eds). *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Dibattista, Maria. 1994. 'Sabath Eyes: Ideology and the Writer's Gaze', in George Levine. (ed). *Aesthetics and Ideology*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Driver, Dorothy. 1988. 'Reconstructing the Self: Black Women Writers and the Autobiographical Text', in Rosalie Breitenbach. (ed). *Journeys of Discovery: A Collection of Lectures*. Grahamstown: 1820 Foundation
- . 1988. 'Woman as Sign in the South African Colonial Enterprise', *Journal of Literary Studies*.
- Dubey, Madhu. 1994. *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Edholm, Felicity. 1982. 'The Unnatural Family', in E. Whitelegg *et al.* (eds). *The Changing Experience of Women*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.

Edwards, Rosalind. 1996. 'White Woman Researcher -- Black Woman Subject', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds). *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London and New Delhi: Sage.

Essop, Ahmed. 1978. 'Film', *Staffrider* 1.3: 29-30.

---. 1978. 'Gladiators', *Staffrider* 1.2: 8-10.

Fanon, Frantz. 1965. *Black Skin, White Masks*. (Translated by Charles Lam Markmann.) New York: Grove.

Farganis, Sondra. 1994. *Situating Feminism: From Thought to Action*. California: Thousand Oaks.

Fatton, Robert. 1986. *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Foulkes, A. P. 1983. *Literature and Propaganda*. London and New York: Methuen.

Friedland, William H. and Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. (eds). 1975. *African Socialism*. California: Stanford University Press.

Gaidzanwa, Rudo. 1985. *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*. Harare: The College Press.

Gardner, Colin. 1982. 'Poetry and/or Politics: Recent South African Black Verse', *English in Africa*. 9.1: 45-54.

Gevisser, Mark. 1995. 'Mamphela Ramphele: If Not A Mother, Then A Witch', *Weekly Mail* October 27 to November 2.

Gillespie, Marcia Ann. 1995. 'The Good/Bad Mother', *Ms*. V.5: 1.

Gilman, S. 1985. 'On Nexus of Blackness and Madness', *Difference and Pathology*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press

Goldblatt, Beth and Sheila Meintjies. 1996. 'Gender and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission'. A Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Johannesburg.

Govinden, Devaraksham Betty. 1996. 'Evaluating the Literary Achievement of Gcina Mhlophe', *AUETSA '96 Conference Proceedings*: 185-195.

Gqola, Pumla Dineo. 1996. 'Reconsidering Motherhood in the Autobiographies of Ellen Kuzwayo and Emma Mashinini', *Inter Action* 4: 47-52.

---. 1997. 'Black Women's Spaces and the Production of Knowledge: Setting the Record Straight on Womanist Issues'. Unpublished Paper.

---. 1998. 'My Body For The Struggle: Blackwoman Sexuality as Enemy Ground in Early *Staffrider*'. Paper presented at the Race and Gender Seminar Series, University of Cape Town.

---. 1998. 'What's In This Womanist Shit? Naming Self As Resistance'. Paper Presented to the First African Womanist Workshop, University of Cape Town. (Forthcoming in Yvette Abrahams. (ed). *The First African Womanist Workshop*. Cape Town: !Kam Press.)

Guy-Sheftall, Beverley. 1986. 'Remembering Sojourner Truth', *Catalyst*. Fall: 54-57.

Gwala, Mafika. 1981. 'Reflections in a Cell', *Staffrider* 4.1: 7-9.

---. 1979. 'Staffrider Workshop', *Staffrider*. 2.3: 55-58.

---. 1972. 'the black thing ... is honest ... is human', *SASO Newsletter*. 2.1: 13.

---. 1988. 'Tracing the Steps', *Matatu* 3-4: 76-95.

---. 1978. 'Words To A Mother', *Staffrider*. 1.2: 4.

Halisi, C. R. D. 1991. 'Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy: An Interpretation', in N. Barney Pitso and Mamphela Ramphele et al. (eds). *op cit*.

Hardman-Cromwell, Youtha C. 1995. 'Living in the Intersection of Afrocentrism: Black Women Writers', in Cheryl J. Sanders. (ed). *Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentricism in Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Hodge, Robert. 1990. *Literature as Discourse*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

hooks, bell and Mary Childers. 1990. 'A Conversation About Race and Class', in Marianne Kirsch and Evelyn Fox-Keller (eds). *Conflicts in Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, bell. 1982. *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. London: Pluto.

---. 1984. *From Margin to Centre*. Boston: South End.

---. 1995. *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. London: Penguin.

---. 1992. 'Loving Blackness as Political Resistance', *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End.

House, Amelia. 1980. 'Mr White Discoverer', *Staffrider*. 3.4: 2.

Irigaray, Luce. 1992. 'Women's Exile', in D. Cameron. (ed). *The Feminist Critique of Language*. London and New York: Routledge.

Jackson, Steri. 1993. 'Women and Family', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds). *Introducing Women's Studies*. London: MacMillan.

Jaggar, Alison. 1983. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Brighton: Harvester.

James, Adeola (ed). 1990. 'Introduction', *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London: Heinemann.

James, Selma. 1985. *Strangers and Sisters: Women, Race and Immigration*. Bristol: Falling Wall.

Jaworski, Adam. 1992. 'How to Silence a Minority: The Case of Women', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*: 27-41.

Kaplan, Cora. 1992. 'Language and Gender', in D. Cameron. (ed). *The Feminist Critique of Language* London and New York: Routledge.

Kapp, R. 1989. 'Contradictions Inherent in Tlali's work', *Die Suid-Afrikaan*. December.

Karodia, Farida. 1993. *A Shattering of Silence*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

kaXhoka, Ntombiyakhe KaBiyela. 1979. 'When Last Did I Have a Good Laugh?', *Staffrider*. 2.4: 61.

Kemp, Amanda; Nozizwe Madlala, Asha Moodley and Elaine Salo. 1996. 'The New South African Feminism'. Discussion Paper at the Colloquium on Current Theorizations of Gender, African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town.

Key, Mary Ritchie. 1975. *Male/Female Language*. New Jersey: Scarecrow.

Kuzwayo, Ellen. 1985. *Call Me Woman*. Randburg: Ravan.

Kirkwood, Mike. 1988. 'Remembering Staffrider', *Ten Years of Staffrider Magazine 1978-1988*: 1-9.

Klein, R. D. and D. L. Steinberg. (eds). 1989. *Radical Voices*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Koloane, David. 1981. 'Art and Social Struggle', *Staffrider*. 4.3: 18.

Koza, Leonard. 1982. 'Reward Our Sweat', *Staffrider*. 4.4: 42-44.

---. 1979. 'Winnie', *Staffrider*. 2.4: 38.

Kuhn, Joy. 1974. 'Poet In Anguish', *Twelve Shades of Black*. Cape Town: Dane Nelson.

Kunene, Daniel. 1982. 'The Spring of Life', *Staffrider*. 4.4: 5-9 and 48.

Kwadi, Jomo. 1995. 'Non-racialism and the Hybridation of the Black Women's Experience'. Unpublished Paper Delivered at a Symposium on Race and Gender Alliances in South Africa, University of Cape Town (see Appendix).

Kwadi, Jomo. 1996. 'What Black People Haven't Done Yet'. *Black Experience*. 2: 1.

- Lenta, Margaret. and Margaret Daymond. 1990. 'Workshop on Black Women's Writing and Reading,' *Current Writing* 2.
- Lenta, Margaret. 1990. 'Communities and Individuals', *Current Writing*. 2.
- Letsoalo, Joseph. 1979. 'Lebandla', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 35.
- Levine, George. (ed). 1994. *Aesthetics and Ideology*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Lewis, Desiree. 1993. 'Feminisms in South Africa', *Women's Studies Forum*. 16.5: 535-542.
- . 1991. 'Myths of Motherhood and Power: Reflections on "Black Woman" in Literature.' Paper Delivered at a Conference on Women and Gender, University of Natal, 30 January-02 February.
- . 1994. 'Women and Gender in South Africa', in Vincent Maphai (ed). *South Africa: The Challenge of Change*. Harare: SAPES: 158-172.
- Lockett, Cecily. 1990. 'Feminism(s) and Writing in South Africa', *Current Writing* 2: 1-21.
- . 1989. 'Miriam Tlali, The Fabric of Experience: A Critical Perspective on the Writing of Miriam Tlali' in Cherry Clayton (ed). *Women and Writing in South Africa*. Marshalltown: Heinemann.
- Lorde, Audre. (1979) 1989. 'Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response', *Conditions Sixteen: A Retrospective*: 28-35.
- Lotter, Hennie. 1993. 'On interpreting Biko and the "New" South Africa: A Reply to Teffo and Ramose', *Acta Academica* 25.2-3: 14-26.
- . 1992. 'The Intellectual Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko (1946-1977)', *Acta Academica* 24.3: 22-36.
- Ludman, B. 1989. 'An Angry Writer Mellow -- But She Still Fights The Silencers', *Weekly Mail* 10-16 March.
- Mabogoane, Meshack. 1978. 'Strangers in the Day', *Staffrider* 1.2: 18-22.
- Makhoere, Caesarina Kona. 1988. *No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid*. London: Women's Press.
- Makou, Anthony. 1979. 'Homage To A Mother', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 21.
- Manaka, Manabile Lister. 1978. 'Black Beautiful Mother', *Staffrider*. 1.1: 35.
- Manganyi, N. Chabani. 1981. *Looking Through The Keyhole*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Mangena, Mosibudi. 1989. *On Your Own: Evolution of Black Consciousness in South Africa/Azania*. Braamfontein: Skotaville.

- Manoko. 1979. 'My Tears', *Staffrider*. 4.2: 60.
- Maqagi, Sisi. 1989. 'Who Theorises?', *Current Writing*. 2: 22-25.
- Martins, Dikobe Wa Mogale. 1981. 'Art Is Not Neutral. Whom Does It Serve?', *Staffrider*. 4.2: 30-31.
- Martyna, Wendy. 1980. 'The Psychology of the Generic Masculine', in McConnel-Ginet, Sally. et al. (eds). *Women and Language in Literature and Society*. New York: Praegar.
- Maseko, Bicca Muntu. 1981. 'Art and Misconception', *Staffrider*. 4.1: 18-19.
- Mashinini, Emma. 1989. *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*. London: Women's Press.
- Mashishi, Kedisaletse. 1979. 'I Am The Equator', *Staffrider*. 2.4: 20.
- Matlou, Rebecca. 1986. 'The South African Woman Writer: In So Far As A Separate Entity', *South African Literature*: 65-78.
- Matshoba, Mtutuzeli. 1978. 'A Glimpse of Slavery', *Staffrider*. 1.4: 11-16 and 40-46.
- . 1979. 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana', *Staffrider*. 2.2: 10-21.
- . 1992. 'Autobiographical Note', *Call Me Not A Man*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- . 1978. 'My Friend, the Outcast', *Staffrider*. 1.2: 11-15.
- . 1979. 'Son of the First Generation', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 24-32.
- . 1979. 'Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion', *Staffrider*. 2.3: 17-20.
- . 1980. 'To Kill A Man's Pride', *Staffrider*. 3.1: 4-6.
- Mattera, Don. 1988. 'Literature for Liberation', *Matatu*. 2.3-4: 2-15.
- Mavuso, Xolile Thabo Mavuso. 1978. 'Sweet Are The Uses of Adversity', *Staffrider* 1.4: 47-48.
- Maynard, Mary. 1993. 'Violence Towards Women', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds). *Introducing Women's Studies*. London: MacMillan.
- McFadden, Susan. 1992. 'Sex, Sexuality and the Problem of Aids in Africa', in *Gender in Southern Africa*. Harare: SAPES.
- Mchunu, Vusi D. and Mbukeni Herbert Mnguni. 1986. 'Ten Years Soweto: Black Writers' Struggle Towards a Literature for Liberation in South Africa', *South African Literature*: 99-103.
- Meese, Elizabeth and Alice Parker. (eds). 1989. *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- Metcalf, Rosamund. 1993. 'The Liberation of Female Consciousness in African Literature', in Emmanuel Ngara & Andrew Morrison (ed) *Literature, Language and Nation*. Harare: Baobab.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other*. Indiana: Bloomington.
- Mofokeng, Boitumelo. 1989. 'Where are the Women? *Ten Years of Staffrider*', *Current Writing* 1: 41-42.
- Mokae, Gomolemo. 1992. 'Back to Basics', *Work in Progress* (Oct): 26-27.
- Moi, Toril. 1985. *Sexual/Textual Politics*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Moodley, Asha. 1993. 'Black Woman You Are On Your Own', *Agenda*. 16: 44-48.
- Moodley, Kogila. 1991. 'The Continued Impact of Black Consciousness', in Pityana, B. and Mamphela Ramphele et al. (eds) *op cit.*: 143-153.
- Moore, Henrietta L. 1988. *Feminism and Anthropology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Morolo, Winnie. 1978. 'Thula San Lwam!', *Staffrider*. 1.4: 48.
- . 1979. 'Courage, African Woman', *Staffrider*. 2.4: 60.
- Morongwanyana. 1981. 'Lone Black Woman', *Staffrider*. 4.3: 36-37.
- Moshi, Lioba. 1996. 'The Manifestation of Gender in Some African Languages', *Womanist Theory and Research: A Journal of Womanist and Feminist-Of-Color Scholarship and Art*. 2.1: 11-20.
- Motaung, Bonisile Joshua. 1979. 'Black Woman, Black Woman', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 20.
- Moya, Sy. 1981. 'Gone Home Simpasa', *Staffrider*. 4.3: 26-27.
- Mphahlele, Es'kia. 1981. 'The Coffee-Cart Girl', *Staffrider*. 4.2: 42-3.
- Mungoshi, Charles. 1980. 'Some Kind of Wounds', *Staffrider*. 3.3: 15-19.
- Mutloatse, Mothobi. (ed). 1980. 'Introduction', *Forced Landing*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- . 1978. 'Lomthwalo: Notes Toward a Film Script', *Staffrider*. 1.4: 49.
- . 1978. 'The Motherly Embrace', *Staffrider*. 1.3: 48.
- . 1978. 'The Night of a Million Spears', *Staffrider*. 1.2: 47-8.
- . (ed). 1981. *Reconstruction: 90 Years of Black Historical Literature*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Mvemve, Lindiwe. 1980a. 'Do I Have To Go To Hell?', *Staffrider*. 3.3: 47.



- . 1980b. 'The Rustle In That Tall Dry Grass', *Staffrider*. 3.3: 47.
- . 1980c. 'Life Is No More', *Staffrider*. 3.3: 47.
- Mzamane, Lerato Nomvuyo. 1982. 'Rethabile', *Staffrider*. 5.2: 27.
- Mzamane, Mbulelo Vizikhungo. 1981. 'Politics and Literature in Africa: A Review', *Staffrider*. 3.4: 4.
- . 1978. 'Sitha', *Staffrider*. 1.2: 4-6.
- . 1991. 'The Impact of Black Consciousness on Culture', in Pityana, B. and Mamphela Ramphele et al. (eds). *op cit*.
- Ndebele, Njabulo. 1994. 'Liberation and the Crisis of Culture', in E. Boehmer. et al. (eds). *Altered States: Writing and South Africa*. Sydney: Dangaroo.
- . 1982. 'The Prophetess', *Staffrider*. 5.1: 2-7.
- Newsham, Gill. 1989. 'We Have It All', in J. Burnett and Julie Coterille et al. (eds). *op cit*.
- Ngcobo, Aubrey. 1978. 'The Day A Leader Died', *Staffrider*. 1.1: 57-58.
- Nhlabatsi, Mzwakhe. 1979. 'Eye', *Staffrider*. 2.2: 54-55.
- Nicolson, Paula. 1993. 'Motherhood and Women's Lives', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson. (eds). *Introducing Women's Studies*. London: MacMillan.
- Nolutshungu, Sam C. 1983. *Changing South Africa*. Cape Town: David Phillip.
- Ntantala, Phyllis. 1992. *A Life's Mosaic*. Cape Town and Bellville: David Philip and Mayibuye Centre.
- Ntuli, Funda. 1982. 'In The Twilight Embraced', *Staffrider*. 4.4: 36.
- Nyerere, Julius. 1990. 'Ujamaa -- the Basis of African Socialism', in Sargent, L. T. (ed). *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Reader*. Carlifornia: Brooks/ Cole.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molaro. 1987. 'The Female Writer and Her Commitment'. *African Literature Today*. 15: 5-13.
- Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo. 'Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Novel In English', *Signs: A Journal of Women and Culture in Society*. 11.1: 63-80.
- Oliphant, Andries Walter. 1991. 'Staffrider magazine and Popular History: The Opportunities and Challenges of Personal Testimony' in J. Brown and Patrick Manning et al. (eds) *History From South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Oliphant, Andries Walter. 1988. 'John Kani: Combatant from the Stage', *Staffrider*. 7.1: 54-61.
- . 1988. 'Comment', *Staffrider*. 7.1: 2-3.
- Paulin, Kate. 1996. 'Putting Pakeha Into The Picture: Analysing Lesbian/Bisexual Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger. (eds). *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London and New York: Sage.
- Penelope, Julia. 1990. *Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues*. New York: Pergamon.
- Phillips, Anne. 1987. *Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Race and Class*. London: Virago.
- Phillips, Layli & Barbara MacCaskill. 1995. 'Who's Schooling Who? Black Women and the Bringing of the Everyday into Academe, or Why We Started *The Womanist*', *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20.4: 1007-1018.
- Phillips, Layli. 1996. 'The Child is Mother to the Woman(ist): A Tribute to Mills College's *The Womanist: A Woman of Color Journal*', *Womanist Theory and Research: A Journal of Womanist and Feminist-Of-Color Scholarship and Art*. 2.1: 1-3.
- Pieterse, Cosmo and Munro, Donald. 1969. *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*. London: Heinemann.
- Pillay, Devan. 1992. 'Fighting apartheid with apartheid -- A response to Gomolemo Mokae', *Work in Progress*. October: 28-29.
- Pityana, N. Barney and Ramphela, Mamphela et al. (eds). 1991. *Bounds of Possibility: Steve Biko and the Legacy of Black Consciousness*. Claremont: David Phillips.
- Plam, Fezile. 1979. 'Face of Africa', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 18.
- . 1979. 'Andinalo', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 18.
- . 1979. 'Ode Of A Woman', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 18.
- Ramphela, Mamphela. 1995. *A Life*. Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip.
- . 1991. 'Empowerment and Symbols of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development', in N. Barney Pityana and Mamphela Ramphela et al. (eds). *op cit*.
- . 1996. 'Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiement of Ambiguity', *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. 125.1: 99-117.
- . 1991. 'The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View', in N. Barney Pityana and Mamphela Ramphela et al. (eds). *op cit*.

---. 1998. 'This Little Bit of Madness: Dr Mamphela Ramphele on Being Black, [Female and] Transgressive', Interviewed by Yates, Kimberley A. and Pumla Dineo Gqola. *Agenda*. 37: 90-95. (See Appendix B)

Reddy, Jayapraga. 1980. 'The Slumbering Spirit', *Staffrider*. 3.1: 20-22.

---. 1982. 'Market Days', *Staffrider*. 5.1: 8-10.

Richardson, Diane. 1996. 'Representing Other Feminists', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger. (eds). *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London and New Delhi: Sage.

---. 1993. 'Sexuality and Male Dominance', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds). *Introducing Women's Studies*. London: MacMillan.

Rive, Richard. 1982. 'Books By Black Writers', *Staffrider*. 5.1: 12-15.

Rodriguez, Cheryl. 1996. 'Anthropology and Womanist Theory: Claiming the Discourse on Gender, Race and Culture', *Womanist Theory and Research: A Journal of Womanist and Feminist-Of-Color Scholarship and Art*. 2.1: 3-11.

Robinson, Victoria. 1993. 'Introducing Women's Studies', in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson. (eds). *Introducing Women's Studies*. London: MacMillan.

Roy, Jackie. 1993. 'Black Women Writing and Reading', in Gina Whisker. (ed). *Black Women's Writing*. London: MacMillan.

Ruddin, Muhammad Omar. 1978, 'Tokologo', *Staffrider*. 1.2: 37.

Russell, Diana E. H. 1996. 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Politics of White Feminists Conducting Research on Black Women in South Africa', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger. (eds). *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London and New Delhi: Sage.

Russell, Diana H. 1989. *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa*. New York: Basic Books.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. 1990. *Contemporary Political Ideology: A Reader*. California: Brooks/Cole.

*SASO Newsletter*. 1972.

Scott, Patricia Bell. 1982. 'Selected Bibliography on Black Feminism', in Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith. (eds). *All The Women Are White, All The Blacks Are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave*. New York: Feminist Press.

Seroke, Jaki. 1981a. 'Poet In Exile: An Interview With Mongane Serote', *Staffrider*. 4.1: 30-31.

---. 1981b. 'Staffrider Speaking: Black Writers in South Africa' *Staffrider*, 4.3: 41-43.

Serote, Mongane Wally. 1983. 'Politics of Culture: South Africa', *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter*, 5.2: 26-34.

---. 1988. 'Review of *Tenderness of Blood* by Mandla Langa', *Sechaba*, June/July.

---. 1985. 'A Tough Tale', *New Nation*, 1-7 December.

Shava, Piniel Viriri. 1989. *A People's Voice: Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century*. London: Zed.

Sibeko, Mandla. 1979. 'Why, Tumelo My Son?', *Staffrider*, 2.1: 11.

Sibisi, C. D. T. 1991. 'The Psychology of Liberation' in N. Barney Pitsoana and Mamphela Ramphele et al. (eds). *op cit.*

Sigwili, Nokugcina. 1980. 'My Dear Madam', *Staffrider*, 3.4: 11-12 and 14.

---. 1980a. 'Men Are Always Women's Children', *Staffrider*, 3.1: 44.

---. 1980b. 'The Building Fell', *Staffrider*, 3.1: 44.

Siluma, Papa. 1981. 'It's Necessary', *Staffrider*, 4.1: 10-11.

Sivanandan, A. 1981. 'Race, Class and Caste in South Africa -- An Open Letter to No Sizwe', *Race and Class*, 22.3: 293-301.

---. 1977. 'The Liberation of the Black Intellectual', *Race and Class*, 18.4: 329-343.

Smith, Barbara. (ed). 1983. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press.

---. (1977) 1989. 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism', *Conditions: Sixteen: A Retrospective*: 6-25.

Smith, Valerie. 1989. 'Gender and Afro-Americanist Literary Theory and Criticism', in Elaine Showalter. (ed). *Speaking Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Snitow, Ann. 1990. 'A Gender Diary', in Marianne Kirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (eds). *Conflicts in Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

Sole, Kelwyn E. 1993. 'Authority, Authenticity and the Black Writer: Depictions of Politics and Community in Selected Fictional Black Consciousness Texts' Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Witwatersrand.

---. 1986. 'Authorship and Authenticity and the Black Community: The Novels of Soweto 1976', Paper delivered at the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand.

---. 1983. 'Culture, Politics and the Black Writer: A Critical Look At Prevailing Assumptions', *English in Africa*. 10.1: 76-95.

---. 1988. 'The Days of Power', *Research in African Literatures*. 19.1: 65-88.

Stratton, Florence. 1994. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge.

Stone, Pauline Terrelonge. 1989. 'Feminist Consciousness and Black Women', in Jo Freeman. (ed). *Women: A Feminist Perspective*. Mountain View, California: Mayfield.

Sylvester, Christine. 1995. 'African and Western Feminisms: World-Travelling the Tendencies and Possibilities', *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 20.4: 941-969.

Teffo, L. J. and M. B. Ramose. 1993. 'Steve Biko and the interpreters of Black Consciousness: A Reply to Lotter', *Acta Academica*. 25.2-3: 1-13.

Thomas, Gladys. 1981. 'The Rose Patterned Wallpaper', *Staffrider*. 4.2: 23-4.

Thubela, Letshaba. 1979. 'It Does Not Help', *Staffrider*. 2.2: 38-39.

Thurer, Shari L. 1994. *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mufflin.

Thusini, Mandlenkosi Martin. 1978. 'Afrika, Afrika', *Staffrider*. 1.4: 27.

Thutloe, R. 1979. 'I've Lost My Music', *Staffrider*. 2.3: 53.

Tlali, Miriam. 1988. 'Images of Women', Paper delivered at Women Speak: Conference on Women and Writing, COSAW, Johannesburg.

---. 1978. 'Soweto Hijack', *Staffrider*. 1.1: 12-20.

---. 1980. 'The Haunting Melancholy of Klipvoordam', *Staffrider*. 4.1: 13-16.

---. 1978. 'The Point Of No Return', *Staffrider*. 1.2: 29-32.

---. 1994. 'Women's Liberation in South Africa, At The Threshold of the 21st Century', Unpublished paper delivered at the South African Research Conference.

Tlali, Sophia. 1979. 'Poem', *Staffrider*. 2.1: 49.

Tong, Rosemary. 1989. *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Valverde, Mariana. 1986. *Sex, Power and Pleasure*. Toronto: New Society.

Van Wyk, Christopher. 1978. 'A Song of Hope', *Staffrider*. 1.2: 34.

Vaughan, Mike. 1981. 'The Stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba', *Staffrider*. 4.3: 45-47.

Walker, Alice. 1983. *In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: Women's Press.

—. 1988. *Living By The Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987*. London: Women's Press.

Wall, Cheryl A. 'On Freedom and the Will To Adorn: Debating Aesthetics and/as Ideology in African American Literature' in George Levine. (ed). *Aesthetics and Ideology*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Warner, Marina. 1994. 'Monstrous Mothers: Women Over The Top', *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time*. London: Vintage.

White, Landerg and Tim Couzens. (eds). 1984. *Literature and Society in South Africa*. Pinelands: Maskew Miller.

Wilding, Jeanne. 1989. 'The Power of Letters and Articles', in J. Burnett and Julie Cotterill et al. (eds). *op cit*.

Wilhelm, Peter. 1982. 'Voices From Within -- Black Poetry From Southern Africa', *Staffrider*. 5.1: 33-34.

Wilkinson, Jane. 1992. *Talking With African Writers*. London and Portsmouth: James Currey and Heinemann.

Wilkinson, Sue and Celia Kitzinger. 1996. 'Theorising Representing the Other', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger. (eds). *Representing the Other: A Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London and New Delhi: Sage.

Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: University of Oxford Press.

Wilson, Lindy. 1991. 'Bantu Stephen Biko', in N. Barney Pitsoana and Mamphela Ramphele et al. (eds). *op cit*.

Yates, Kimberley Ann. 1996. 'To Be [Feminist] or Not To Be? That Is Not *The* Question: A Womanist Critique', Paper Presented at the Annual Inter Action Conference, Bains Kloof.

Zhana (ed). 1988. *Sojourn*. London: Methuen.

Zylstra, Bernard. 1993. 'Steve Biko and Black Consciousness in South Africa', *Acta Academica* 25.2-3: 27-41.

## **Appendix A**

**Jomo Kwadi**

### **Non-racialism and the Hybridation of the Black Woman's Experience**

**Unpublished Paper Delivered at a Student Symposium on Race and Gender, University of Cape Town, September 1995.**

*All* Women are oppressed but more the black woman than the white. My starting point is that feminism is not a homogenous movement. It has always been plagued by civil war over conflicting ideas. The nature and content of the conflict has to do with the perspectives differentially influenced by race and class.

For me feminism is informed by the experience of women. However, in South Africa, because the experiences of black women and those of white women are different, their feminisms have to differ. There should be a black feminism because there is a white feminism which is not called white. This white Eurocentric and Western feminism wants to hegemonise itself as the only legitimate feminism. What it seeks to do is colonise the experiences of black women and remake them in the image of white women's experiences.

White mainstream feminism does not speak to the experiences of black women. Even the concepts used were not developed with the black woman in mind. When white feminism attempts to speak to the experiences of black women, it does so in a maternalistic and racist manner.

Black Women need to realise that:

Although subjected to male domination, they have to struggle for survival in a system of white domination. It is in this struggle that black men were comrades and allies of black women when your white sisters were/ are oppressors. White women share privileged ethnic-racial-economic interests with white men rather than with black women.

Therefore the anti-sexist movement in South Africa has to be under the leadership of black working class women. On the other hand, white women need to confront and deal with their position of privilege.

Black women need to develop a feminism which will be underpinned by the experiences of black people. This black feminism needs to expose classical, Eurocentric white feminism which is based on the experiences of white women.

The liberation of the black women is the responsibility of the black woman, neither the black man nor the white feminist.

## Appendix B

Kimberley A. Yates (KAY) and Pumla Dineo Gqola (PDG) interviewed Dr Mamphela A. Ramphela (MAR), 27 June 1996 at the University of Cape Town

**KAY:** In both your autobiography and in *Bounds of Possibility* you discuss honorary male status which seems to assume that as women your voices and ideas weren't valued as much as men's, in that for your ideas to be valued you had to be given an honorary male status. In line with that it seems that much of the ideology of Black Consciousness was articulated in terms of the Black man, the Black man's struggle. My question following from that is: How do you recall being affected by the persistent reference to Black man and his struggle?

**MAR:** I think it's important to realise that the Black Consciousness Movement came in a cultural environment where women, whether they were Black or white, didn't matter. It wasn't a peculiarity of the Black Consciousness Movement to focus on men. I think the focus on Black men had the unintended consequence of actually triggering in some of us the sense that we're more than just Black people who are oppressed, we were also Black women who were oppressed both by the very system that oppressed Black men but also by the Black men themselves -- the very sense of being silent, being invisible.

The language didn't have space for women partly because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens. It's very interesting actually that African languages don't have this very strong sexist exclusive notions. That does not mean that African cultures are not sexist. It simply is an interesting observation because in a way to say 'Black man you are on your own', which was the rallying cry of the Black Consciousness Movement, was in a sense a translation of what if an African language had been used would not have had the connotations. It would not have said, for example in Xhosa: 'Ndod' emnyama ume wedwa'. It would have said 'Mnt' omnyama ...' which is much more inclusive. It is interesting how metaphors borrowed from one language get translated or transformed by the language that you use to express yourself in a way that would not have had the same impact if you had actually said it in a different language environment. So for me really the Black Consciousness Movement, by speaking of psychological oppression as being an integral part of any oppressive situation and by identifying the agency of the oppressed in being able to overcome psychological oppression by taking charge of their own definition of themselves, their own self-reliance, actually enabled me to put into context how I, as a Black woman, could also overcome the psychological oppression of being a woman and therefore being seen as 'other' and therefore being seen as inferior. For me that was very easy to do because I've never thought of myself as being inferior to any man: where I grew up, in my family, everybody knew I wasn't inferior, everybody knew I was smart. So it was never serious. I didn't have the psychological scars of an inferiority complex as a woman and in fact as it turns out, in school there wasn't a single boy who could beat me. It didn't even occur to me that they could think of me as being inferior. The jump for me was very easy because it simply fitted in with my own experience of myself as being somebody who is capable of holding her own in any set up.

So the question of an honorary man is an observation of what's happening. It's an observation of the impositions that one has even when one doesn't need the status and I've written quite in depth about this question of political widowhood. (You've seen the article that came out



in ... *Social*, no, not *Social Dynamics*<sup>1</sup>. It's published in Boston, one of these prestigious international journals. Anyway, I'll remember. Just remind me at the end of the interview, I'll see if I still have the reprints of that.) Because you see the political widows are the ultimate embodiment of this honorary male status whether you are looking at Benazir Bhuto taking on her father's role as former leader of Pakistan, or you're looking at the woman from the Phillipines, Corrina [Aquino], who was here a few weeks ago, or looking at the woman in Sri Lanka who's now leading the government there because her husband got assassinated. If you're looking at any of these, the honorary male status is what's put them there, but when you look at those women in their own individual rights they've got strengths and power and so on which goes beyond the status that has been bestowed on them. The honorary male status is a reality, but I use the expression in order to challenge it.

**KAY:** You talk about the differences between English and the African languages. In English that difference is more explicit. Do you recall being aware of the absence of the women in the discourse at the time?

**MAR:** At the time of Black Consciousness?

**KAY:** Yes.

**MAR:** Oh, of course I do and I became one of the few women who really became a pain in the side of a lot of men who used to really think that we were there as decorations. They got shocked each time you challenged them in debates and they'd try and silence you by making all sorts of remarks, wolf whistles and all sorts of insinuations that, "Oh, it's very surprising that not only are you beautiful but you also have brains" -- that kind of childishness, and the kind of trivialisation of issues that one raised. But also, [there were] the expectations [that] because we were women, when we went to a SASO conference, we were supposed to do the cooking and the preparing of food and so on. If you said NO, there was something very funny about you saying NO. And in an interesting way we played along with that until you were conscious of it. If you grew up in a home where the girls feed the men and they do the cleaning up ... In my own household it wasn't as it was in other households. Nonetheless boys were there to help us, not to participate in domestic chores and so there was nothing funny about getting to a university and continuing to play, even in an organisational sense, that role because it's what you were brought up to believe was your calling and your responsibility. But when one became conscious of the game that was being played and people started saying NO, people really took a dim view of it. In my view, you know, one of the fascinating things about Gender Equity issues is that it doesn't matter how much people understand intellectually what's going on, the problem is to translate the intellectual understanding into a transformative behavioural change which is very, very painful, for both sides incidentally. Women can scream and shout about not wanting to perpetuate the existing inequality but there are women who enjoy, for example, the fact that they are in control of the household. They do this: "It's my kitchen, my this, my that", and they derive pleasure out of feeding people, out of being admired for what they do in that domain. And so taking that out is almost like taking out what defines them as valued members of a household. And if you're not doing anything that also acts as a counterbalancing definitional issue yourself, definition becomes a problem. So it's not easy to simply say,

---

<sup>1</sup> The article is "Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity", *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. 125(1), 1996: 99-117.

“Get the men to do this”.

Even on the issue of bringing up children, a lot of women actually directly or indirectly exclude men from the domain of bringing up children, but then they complain about the burden of it. There needs to be a serious psychological examination of that: what is it about women that makes us *need* to do these things, *need* to feed, *need* to nurture? There’s nothing wrong with that, provided you understand what you’re doing in those roles, then you do it openly. You mustn’t do it grudgingly. It’s almost like being an alcoholic: you’re hooked on the stuff but you don’t acknowledge that you actually are hooked. And then you mouth these feminist slogans about not wanting to be tied down to the household and so on, but if you’re not sharing, you’re not willing to share, you *have* to be tied down and that’s on the one side. On the male side, it is a problem, I mean it” very comfortable, I must tell you that one of the smartest institutions ever created by patriarchy was having a wife -- the smartest thing ever! Nothing can ever beat a wife -- absolutely nothing, because you have somebody who loves you personally, who can attend to each and every one of your needs, physical, emotional, sexual. I mean, if I can invent an institution – that’s the one that I wouldn’t mind. Therefore it’s not surprising that you’ll find resistance among men who actually confront issues of gender equity. Who would want to do away with that convenience? Really, who would? You’d be nuts to want to do away with that. Unless you examine it in a way that allows you to realise that in fact you *can* have the love and the caring without necessarily having to dominate and then you negotiate a new relationship where in fact the man benefits from having a wife and the wife benefits from having a husband in the same kind of supportive role. It’s a very, very, very difficult and tricky issue.

**PDG:** Dr Ramphele, you have very actively challenged prescriptions on female behaviour then and now. What do you see as the difficulties or the barriers, so to speak, that have been in the way of your successfully challenging the man-centred (the Black man-centred) discourse of Black Consciousness at the time?

**MAR:** I think the most important difficulty or the greatest difficulty one faces in any system in any part is that you become unpopular, and therefore if you are needing to feel affirmed, to be told that you are a wonderful person, that you are a beautiful person, you’re this you’re that, then you can’t actually do it. So that a starting point for one wanting to undertake the role of challenging existing popular traditional notions is that you’ve got to have a very strong sense of yourself and your worth, your dignity and be willing to risk all that. Now *I* could do that. I could afford it because I didn’t need to be loved; I didn’t need to be told I’m this or that. I knew what I was and I was comfortable with the person I knew I was. But I was also very lucky in that I was loved by one of the most powerful men in that movement. So it made it easier for me. I mean, we didn’t agree. In fact, there were times when he had difficulty with my being so determined and so insistent, so vocal in my opposition to things because he thought I was overstating things. I probably was because if you have to move from silence, to be heard, you literally have to scream and I used to scream at those meetings and they would want to silence me. I’d tell them you are talking rubbish and they never forgave me for that. So I was in that kind of fortunate role. But I am quite sure that even if I wasn’t having that relationship with him, I would still do it. I believed so deeply in the things that I was concerned about.

The second difficulty of course is that other women also have difficulty with someone who is so insistent on challenging existing notions partly because they envy that you have the courage to speak, and they’ll say, “Well, uzenza betere”, “She thinks she’s better”. And so you have a problem: women’s solidarity falters on the basis of petty jealousies. Instead of people recognising

that each one of us brings different strengths to whatever we're doing, we want to have a kind of social level. Women are very comfortable with solidarity provided all are equal in the sense of levelling everything to the lowest common denominator. Fortunately I don't have the herd instinct. I can live on my own quite happily. I've never needed to have friends. I've loved friends and I've had very good friends but I've never had to make compromises in order to keep friends. I just don't think friendships should be based on compromise. I think you should have a friendship in spite of differences and you should be able to respect one another's differences and support one another. Even if you disagree with the person's viewpoint you must be able to defend their right to have that viewpoint. Now if that's not the way people relate to me, I have a way of just not bothering to be with them.

The very third problem of course is that with that kind of approach then you don't have a sounding board. You don't know whether actually you're going a bit nuts or not. And that's been my problem. You stop trusting other people's judgement because they are so coloured by all sorts of considerations, not necessarily a hard look at what's going on. So, I found that quite strangely, my most reliable sounding boards have been men and as I get older, much older men, Black and white are much more reliable as sounding boards for me than women are, which is a very strange phenomenon but that's true. I think in part it's because I don't pose a threat to those men, I mean, I'm not competing with them over anything and they are themselves very secure in who they are, so they don't have to be defensive towards me. And I'm very honest about my own weaknesses which is probably stupid and you can see it in my biography. I write openly about the stupidity in my own personality, my experiences and so I think that kind of openness enables people to relate with me from a very different starting point.

But at the end of the day, to be as transgressive as I am, transgressing so many boundaries and taboos and so on, is a very lonely life. Lonely, not in the sense that I'm bored and I don't know what to do, not that, because I am lonely in the midst of crowds in a way. It's this little madness. You always have a sense of needing to have peers that you could really take for granted, say things that are taken for granted instead of having to defend each and every thing that you say. So it's a very exhausting life.

**KAY:** It's very clear that you are vocal in challenging whatever you felt restricted you. Was there a sense of sisterhood or solidarity among women overall in challenging what Pumla described as "prescriptions for female behaviour"?

**MAR:** Yes and No. Yes in the sense that at a certain basic fundamental level there were a group of women in the Black Consciousness Movement and some of them have remained friends up to now. We were all agreed that we were not going to accept certain things. We made that clear. And there was that kind of solidarity, people like Debs Matshoba, Thenjiwe Mtintso and others. We were very, very clear about those things. But it was a solidarity that was rather loose and fragile and there were no real continuities because you must understand that there wasn't really a theoretical understanding of what was going on with us, or a theoretical understanding of Gender Equity or inequity. It was all a question of experiencing things and trying to interpret them as best we could. I only got to read feminist literature in the '70s, long after my activist days were gone, so then I could retrospectively understand why I felt the way I did and some of the arguments I could have used instead of screaming and telling them they're talking rubbish. One interesting thing about this challenging expectations and traditional norms is a fascinating example of the kind of support one got from very unexpected quarters was my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, who defended my smoking to people in the village who were saying, "Woo! How can she smoke?" She said,

"There are worse things that you can do: you can kill people, be a drunkard. She's none of that. She just smokes; what's wrong with smoking?" And she had never smoked in her life, had never seen a woman smoke but somehow because she loved me and she admired what I was doing, she just felt I've got a right to make a decision to smoke or not to smoke, which was fascinating. I mean, it wasn't the most laudable thing to do, but there you are. In those days it was a statement of independence.

**KAY:** I recall you saying at that the time, you were reading Eldridge Cleaver and Fanon. Do you see an overlap between the discourses of Black Power and Black Consciousness?

**MAR:** Yes and No. Yes, in the sense that the Black Power Movement in the United States was talking the same language about the need for Black identity to be recognised, affirmed and be seen not as an aberration but as part of the creation plan. As for Frantz Fanon, what we benefited from him was his deep understanding of the psyche of the oppressed. That's what was very important for us. But what we read in that quite clearly was that we were a majority in this country. We had the power to change things. It never was in doubt that we were going to be free. It was a question of when, it was never if, which was a different position from where Eldridge Cleaver and company were operating from.

**PDG:** Dr Ramphela, as Black women who are womanists we've been struck by the lack of material on or by Black women, especially the five names that crop up all over the place: Deborah Matshoba, Nomsisi Kraai, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Mamphela Ramphele and Vuyi Mashalaba. We're struck by the fact that apart from yourself, there isn't visibility, there isn't really material on these women, by these women even at the time. Could you provide some insight into that? Was there an unspoken rule about women writing in Black Consciousness at the time?

**MAR:** No, I think it's a reflection of several things. First, Black people just didn't write -- period! One of my great sadnesses is that Steve's huge intellect has not left a deeper imprint on the South African landscape that he could have. And it's partly because there wasn't a culture of writing -- period. But of all the people, Steve wrote the most and I can tell you it was like pulling teeth, because he used to leave it till the last minute and it had to be done throughout the night, and it was a painful process. In an interesting way, perhaps it fired *me* with an enthusiasm to write but I've always loved books. From my childhood I loved books, I've worshipped books and as I've said before I don't have the herd instinct. When I'm on my own, what do I do? I read or sleep and both are very good for creativity. So there is that. So it's a kind of a general lack of focus on the written word which I think is fair to say Black South Africans are only waking up to that. It wasn't really part of what people did ordinarily.

The second thing is that obviously there were very few women who had the public platform to speak, let alone write. But also women don't create space for themselves to write because they don't have wives, they don't have this, they don't have that.

And, thirdly, there are a lot of women who even today disagree with the fact that I have written my autobiography, because they think that there are certain things that shouldn't be said publicly. I happen to disagree. Nobody thinks that there's anything wrong with Mandela writing his autobiography. Maybe they're right, I'm too young, but then I've done a lot for my age and I wouldn't be able to go on to the next stage of my life with the burden from the past. So many things had to be written. Of course I also knew that there would be people, young women like yourselves who would want to know what happened.

"There are worse things that you can do: you can kill people, be a drunkard. She's none of that. She just smokes; what's wrong with smoking?" And she had never smoked in her life, had never seen a woman smoke but somehow because she loved me and she admired what I was doing, she just felt I've got a right to make a decision to smoke or not to smoke, which was fascinating. I mean, it wasn't the most laudable thing to do, but there you are. In those days it was a statement of independence.

**KAY:** I recall you saying at that the time, you were reading Eldridge Cleaver and Fanon. Do you see an overlap between the discourses of Black Power and Black Consciousness?

**MAR:** Yes and No. Yes, in the sense that the Black Power Movement in the United States was talking the same language about the need for Black identity to be recognised, affirmed and be seen not as an aberration but as part of the creation plan. As for Frantz Fanon, what we benefited from him was his deep understanding of the psyche of the oppressed. That's what was very important for us. But what we read in that quite clearly was that we were a majority in this country. We had the power to change things. It never was in doubt that we were going to be free. It was a question of when, it was never if, which was a different position from where Eldridge Cleaver and company were operating from.

**PDG:** Dr Ramphela, as Black women who are womanists we've been struck by the lack of material on or by Black women, especially the five names that crop up all over the place: Deborah Matshoba, Nomsisi Kraai, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Mamphela Ramphela and Vuyi Mashalaba. We're struck by the fact that apart from yourself, there isn't visibility, there isn't really material on these women, by these women even at the time. Could you provide some insight into that? Was there an unspoken rule about women writing in Black Consciousness at the time?

**MAR:** No, I think it's a reflection of several things. First, Black people just didn't write -- period! One of my great sadnesses is that Steve's huge intellect has not left a deeper imprint on the South African landscape that he could have. And it's partly because there wasn't a culture of writing -- period. But of all the people, Steve wrote the most and I can tell you it was like pulling teeth, because he used to leave it till the last minute and it had to be done throughout the night, and it was a painful process. In an interesting way, perhaps it fired *me* with an enthusiasm to write but I've always loved books. From my childhood I loved books, I've worshipped books and as I've said before I don't have the herd instinct. When I'm on my own, what do I do? I read or sleep and both are very good for creativity. So there is that. So it's a kind of a general lack of focus on the written word which I think is fair to say Black South Africans are only waking up to that. It wasn't really part of what people did ordinarily.

The second thing is that obviously there were very few women who had the public platform to speak, let alone write. But also women don't create space for themselves to write because they don't have wives, they don't have this, they don't have that.

And, thirdly, there are a lot of women who even today disagree with the fact that I have written my autobiography, because they think that there are certain things that shouldn't be said publicly. I happen to disagree. Nobody thinks that there's anything wrong with Mandela writing his autobiography. Maybe they're right, I'm too young, but then I've done a lot for my age and I wouldn't be able to go on to the next stage of my life with the burden from the past. So many things had to be written. Of course I also knew that there would be people, young women like yourselves who would want to know what happened.

**PDG:** In your autobiography, you illustrate very clearly that you come from a long line of strong women, women who challenged sexist practices and won. To what extent do you feel that this has influenced your own ability to transgress at the time of BC, and later your overt espousal of feminism?

**MAR:** Obviously it played a part. I grew up knowing from these women that anything that interferes with their dignity, whether it be a staff member who treats a patient unfairly, even myself, sometimes I lost my temper; I got mad and tired. I would apologise, because I knew that I shouldn't do that. So that theory really came later and I think the theory comes easier when you've actually practised things from the heart, so my theoretical grounding is informed by a very deep psychic knowledge of what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a Black person, to be powerful and not dominating, what it means to be, you know, all those things.

That's why when I read feminist literature I could admire the strong points of it. I could see its weaknesses immediately -- this whole sense of solidarity of women that does not take into consideration that women are different. They're defined differently by their social class, their geographical location, their age, their relationship with men, and so on. But also the fact that we are not ever going to liberate women until we have begun to help men to see how imprisoned they also are by Gender inequity. And so in the same way that Black Consciousness spoke to Black people to liberate themselves, it also spoke to white people to recognise that the freedom of Black South Africans is as important to them because they can't be free until Black South Africans are free. Same thing, women can never be free until men are free of the prejudices they have in sexist terms. You won't know that by reading any book - you know that in your gut. I happen to be a mother of two sons, and I'm not doing a great job at the behavioural level but they understand intellectually, they understand what the issues are. Now it's up to the women they interact with if they are going to let them get away with murder, because they will.